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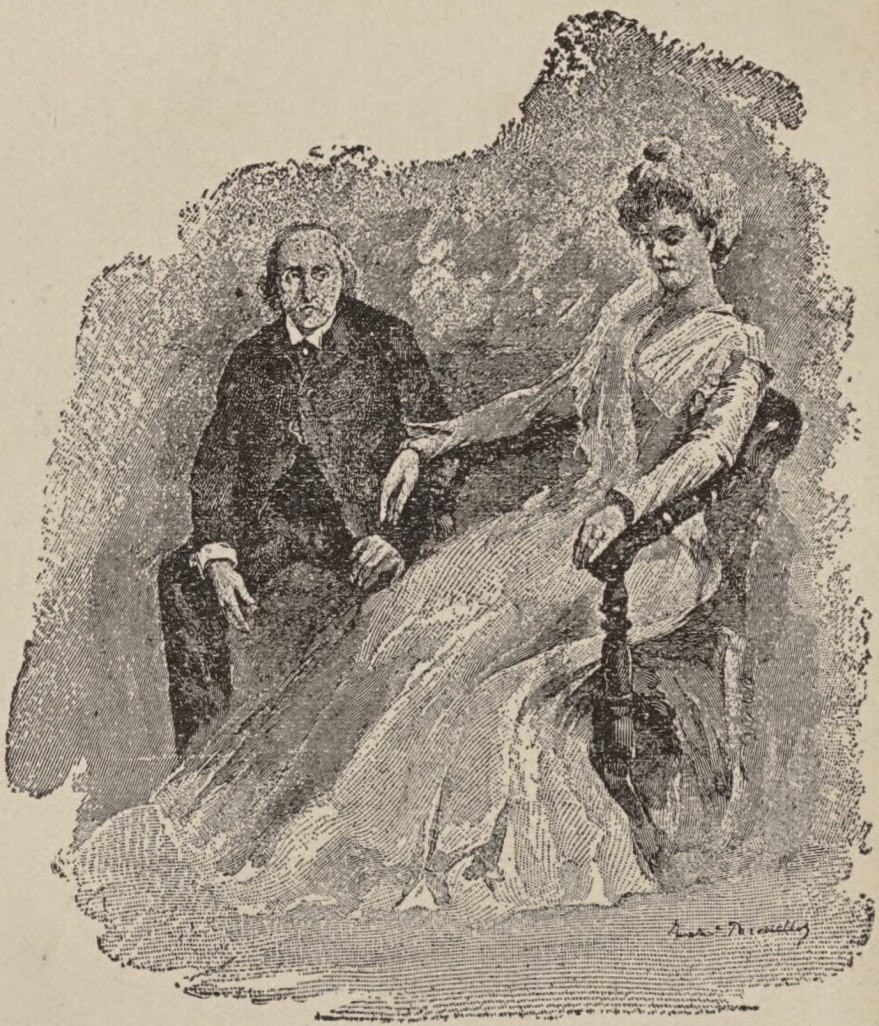

The Door

MOIRON

AND SHORT STORIES

BY

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

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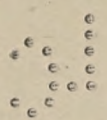

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MOIRON

AS we were still talking about Pranzini, M. Maloureau, who had been Attorney General under the Empire, said: "Oh! I formerly knew a very curious affair, curious for several reasons, as you will see.

"I was at that time Imperial Attorney in one of the provinces. I had to take up the case which has remained famous under the name of the Moiron case.

"Monsieur Moiron, who was a teacher in the North of France, enjoyed an excellent reputation throughout the whole country. He was a person of intelligence, quiet, very religious, a little taciturn; he had married in the District of Boislinot, where he exercised his profession. He had had three children, and each one of them had died from lung disease. From this time he seemed to bestow upon the youngsters confided to his care all the tenderness of his heart. With his own money he bought toys for his best scholars and for the good boys; he gave them little dinners and stuffed them with delicacies, sweet things and cakes. Everybody loved this good man with such a big heart, when suddenly, in a strange manner, five of his pupils died,

one after the other. People looked for an epidemic in the water resulting from the drought; they looked for the causes without being able to discover them, the more so that the symptoms were so strange. The children seemed to be attacked by a languishing sickness; they would no longer eat, they complained of pains in their stomachs, dragged along for a short time, and died in frightful suffering.

"A post-mortem examination was held over the last one, but nothing was found. The vitals were sent to Paris and analyzed, and they revealed the presence of no toxic substance.

"For a year nothing new developed; then two little boys, the best scholars in the class, Moiron's favourites, died within four days of each other. An examination of the bodies was again ordered, and in both of them were discovered tiny fragments of crushed glass. The conclusion arrived at was that the two youngsters must imprudently have eaten from some carelessly cleaned receptacle. A glass broken over a pail of milk could have produced this frightful accident, and the affair would have been pushed no further if Moiron's servant had not been taken sick at this time. The physician who was called in noticed the same symptoms he had seen in the children. He questioned her and obtained the admission that she had stolen and eaten some confections that had been bought by the teacher for his scholars.

"On an order from the court the schoolhouse was searched, and a closet was found which was

full of toys and dainties destined for the children. Almost all these delicacies contained bits of crushed glass or pieces of broken needles!

"Moiron was immediately arrested; but he seemed so astonished and indignant at the suspicion hanging over him that he was almost released. However, indications of his guilt kept appearing, and I struggled in my mind with my first conviction, based on his excellent reputation, on his whole life, on the complete absence of any motives for such a crime.

"Why should this good, simple, religious man have killed children, and the very children whom he seemed to love the most, whom he spoiled and stuffed with sweet things, for whom he spent half his salary in buying toys and bonbons?

"One must believe him insane in order to think him guilty of this act. Now, Moiron seemed so normal, so quiet, so full of reason and common sense that it seemed impossible he should be touched by madness.

"However, the proofs kept growing! In none of the sweets that were bought at the places where the schoolmaster secured his provisions could the slightest fragment of anything suspicious be found.

"He then pretended that an unknown enemy must have opened his cupboard with a false key in order to introduce the glass and the needles into the eatables. And he imagined the whole story of an inheritance depending upon the death of a child, looked for by some peasant, and obtained thus, by casting suspicions on the schoolmaster. This brute,

he claimed, did not care about the other children who were thus forced to die.

"The story was possible. The man appeared to be so sure of himself and in such despair that we should undoubtedly have acquitted him, notwithstanding the charges against him, if two crushing discoveries had not been made, one after the other.

"The first one was a snuffbox full of crushed glass; his own snuffbox, hidden in the desk where he kept his money!

"He explained this new find in an acceptable manner, as the ruse of the real unknown criminal. But a mercer from Saint-Marlof came to the presiding judge and said that a gentleman had several times come to his store to buy some needles; and he always asked for the thinnest needles he could find, and would break them to see whether they pleased him. The man was brought forward in the presence of a dozen or more persons, and immediately recognized Moiron. The inquest revealed that the schoolmaster had indeed gone into Saint-Marlof on the days mentioned by the tradesman.

"I will pass over the terrible testimony of children on the choice of dainties and the care which he took to have them eat the things before him, and to do away with the slightest trace.

"Public opinion became exasperated, and demanded capital punishment, and it became more and more insistent.

"Moiron was condemned to death, and his appeal was rejected. Nothing was left for him but

the imperial pardon. I knew through my father that the Emperor would not grant it.

"One morning, as I was walking in my study, the visit of the prison almoner was announced. He was an old priest who knew men well and understood the habits of criminals. He seemed troubled, ill at ease, nervous. After talking for a few minutes about one thing and another, he arose and said suddenly: 'If Moiron is executed, Monsieur, you will have killed an innocent man.'

"Then he left without bowing, leaving behind him a deep impression with his words. He had pronounced them in such a sincere and solemn manner, opening, in order to save a life, these lips closed and sealed by the secret of confession.

"An hour later I left for Paris, and my father immediately asked that I be granted an audience with the Emperor.

"The following day I was received. His Majesty was working in a little study when we were introduced. I exposed the whole affair, and I was just telling about the priest's visit when a door opened behind the sovereign's chair and the Empress, who thought him alone, appeared. His Majesty, Napoleon, consulted her. As soon as she had heard the matter, she exclaimed: 'Since this man is innocent, he must be pardoned.'

"Why did this sudden conviction of a religious woman cast a terrible doubt in my mind?

"Until then I had ardently desired a change of sentence. And now I suddenly felt myself the toy, the dupe of a cunning criminal who had employed

the priest and confession as a last means of defense.

"I explained my hesitancy to their Majesties. The Emperor remained undecided, urged on one side by his natural kindness, and held back on the other by the fear of being deceived by a criminal; but the Empress, who was convinced that the priest had obeyed a divine inspiration, kept repeating: 'Never mind! It is better to spare a criminal than to kill an innocent man!' Her advice was taken. The death sentence was commuted to one of hard labour.

"A few years later I heard that Moiron had again been called to the Emperor's attention on account of his exemplary conduct in the prison at Toulon, and was now employed as a servant by the director of the penitentiary.

"For a long time I heard nothing more of this man.

"But about two years ago, while I was spending a summer near Lille with my cousin, De Larielle, I was informed one evening, just as we were sitting down to dinner, that a young priest wished to speak to me.

"I had him shown in and he begged me to come to a dying man who desired absolutely to see me. This had often happened to me in my long career as a magistrate, and, although set aside by the Republic, I was still often called upon in similar circumstances. I, therefore, followed the priest, who led me to a miserable little room in a large tenement house.

"There I found a strange-looking man reclining on a bed of straw, with his back to the wall, in order better to breathe. He was a sort of skeleton, with dark, gleaming eyes.

"As soon as he saw me, he murmured: 'Don't you recognize me?'

"'No.'

"'I am Moiron.'

"I felt a shiver run through me, and I asked: 'The schoolmaster?'

"'Yes.'

"'How do you happen to be here?'

"'That story is too long, I haven't time to tell it. . . I was going to die . . . and that priest was brought to me . . . and as I knew that you were here I sent for you. . . . It is to you that I wish to confess . . . since you were the one who saved my life . . . formerly.'

"His hands contracted over the straw of his bed; and he continued in a hoarse, energetic, and low voice: 'You see . . . I owe you the truth . . . I owe it to you . . . for it must be told to some one before I leave this earth.

"'It is I who killed the children . . . all of them . . I did it . . . for revenge!

"'Listen. I was an honest, straightforward, pure man . . . adoring God . . . this good Father . . . this Master who teaches us to love, and not the false God, the executioner, the robber, the murderer who governs the earth. I had never done any harm, I had never committed

an evil act. I was as good as it is possible to be, Monsieur.

"'I married and had children, and I loved them as no father or mother ever loved their children. I lived only for them. I was wild about them. All three of them died! Why? why? What had I done? I felt revolted, furious; and suddenly my eyes were opened as if I were waking up out of a sleep; I understood that God is bad. Why had He killed my children? I opened my eyes and saw that He loves to kill. He loves only that, Monsieur. He gives life but to destroy it! God, Monsieur, is a murderer! He needs death every day. And He makes it in every variety, in order better to be amused. He has invented sickness and accidents in order to give Him diversion over the winter months and through the years; and when He grows tired of this, He has epidemics, the pest, cholera, diphtheria, smallpox, everything possible! But this does not satisfy Him; all these things are too similar; and so from time to time He has wars, in order to see two hundred thousand soldiers killed at once, crushed in blood and in the mud, gutted, their arms and legs torn off, their heads smashed by bullets, like eggs falling on the pavement.

"'But this is not all. He has made men who eat each other. And then, as men become better than He, He has made beasts, in order to see men hunt them, kill, and eat them. That is not all. He has made tiny little animals which live one day, flies who die by the millions in one hour, ants which we are continually crushing under our feet, and so

many, many others that we cannot even imagine. And all these things are continually killing each other and dying. And the good Lord looks on and is amused, for He sees everything, the big ones as well as the little ones, those who are in the drops of water and those in the other firmaments. He watches them and is amused. Wretch!

"'Then, Monsieur, I began to kill children. I played a trick on Him. He did not get those, it was I who did. Not He, but I! And I would have killed many others, but you caught me. There!

"'I was to be executed. I! How He would have laughed! Then I asked for a priest, and I lied. I confessed. I lied and I lived.

"'Now, all is over. I can no longer escape from Him. I no longer fear Him, Monsieur, I despise Him too much.'

"This poor wretch was frightful to see as he lay there gasping, opening an enormous mouth in order to let out words which could scarcely be heard, choking and spitting, picking at his bed and kicking around under a filthy sheet as though trying to escape.

"Oh! Even the memory of it is frightful!

"I asked him: 'You have nothing more to say?'

"'No, Monsieur.'

"'Then, farewell.'

"'Farewell, Monsieur, till some day. . . .'

"I turned to the ashen-faced priest, whose dark outline stood out against the wall, and asked. 'Are you going to stay here, Monsieur l'Abbé?'

"'Yes.'

"Then the dying man cackled: 'Yes, yes, he sends the vultures to the corpses.'

"I had had enough of this; I opened the door and ran away."

THE LEGEND OF MONT SAINT-MICHEL

I HAD first seen this fairy-like castle in the sea from Cancale. It had looked to me like a confused mass, like a gray shadow rising in the foggy sky. I saw it again from Avranche at sunset. The immense stretch of sand was red, the horizon was red, the whole boundless bay was red; alone, the castle, growing out there in the distance like a fantastic manor, like a dream palace, strange and beautiful—this alone remained almost black in the brilliancy of the dying day.

The following morning at dawn I went toward it across the sands. My eyes fastened on this gigantic jewel, as big as a mountain, cut like a cameo, and as dainty as lace. The nearer I approached the greater my admiration grew, for nothing in the world could be more wonderful or more perfect.

As surprised as if I had discovered the habitation of a god, I wandered through those halls supported by frail or massive columns, raising my eyes in wonder to those spires which looked like rockets starting for the sky, and to that incredible crowd of towers, of gargoyles, of slender and charming ornaments, a regular fireworks of stone, granite lace, a masterpiece of colossal and delicate architecture.

As I was looking up in ecstasy, a Lower Nor-

mandy peasant came up to me and told me the story of the great quarrel between Saint Michel and the Devil.

A sceptical genius has said: "God made man in His image; man has returned the compliment."

This saying is an eternal truth, and it would be very curious to write the history of the local divinity on every continent, as well as the history of the patron saints in each one of the provinces. The negro has his ferocious man-eating idols; the polygamous Mahometan fills his paradise with women; the Greeks, like a practical people, have deified all the passions.

Every village in France is under the influence of some protecting saint, modelled according to the characteristics of the inhabitants.

Saint Michel watches over Lower Normandy, Saint Michel, the radiant and victorious angel, the sword-carrier, the hero of Heaven, the victorious, the conqueror of Satan.

But this is how the Lower Normandy peasant, cunning, underhanded, and tricky, understands and tells of the struggle between the great Saint and the Devil.

To escape from the malice of his neighbour the Demon, Saint Michel built himself, in the open ocean, this habitation worthy of an archangel; and only such a saint could build a residence of such magnificence.

But, as he still feared the approaches of the Wicked One, he surrounded his domains by quicksands, more treacherous even than water.

The Devil lived in a humble cottage on the hill; but he owned all the salt marshes, the rich lands where grow the finest crops, the wooded valleys, and all the fertile hills of the country; but the Saint ruled only over the sands. Therefore Satan was rich, whereas Saint Michel was as poor as a church mouse.

After a few years of fasting the Saint grew tired of this state of affairs, and began to think of some compromise with the Devil; but the matter was by no means easy, as Satan kept a good hold on his crops.

He thought the thing over for about six months; then one morning he set out for land. The Demon was eating his soup in front of his door when he saw the Saint; he immediately rushed toward him, kissed the hem of his sleeve, invited him in, and offered him refreshments.

Saint Michel drank a bowl of milk and then began: "I have come here to propose to you a good bargain."

The Devil, candid and trustful, answered: "Very well."

"Here it is. Give me all your lands."

Satan, growing alarmed, wished to speak: "But——"

The Saint continued: "Listen first. Give me all your lands. I will take care of all the work, the plowing, the sowing, the fertilizing, everything, and we will share the crops equally. How does that suit you?"

The Devil, who was naturally lazy, accepted. He

only asked in addition for a few of those delicious *surmullets* which can be caught around the solitary mountain. Saint Michel promised the fish.

They shook hands and spat to show that it was a bargain, and the Saint continued: "Here, so that you will have nothing to complain of, choose that part of the crops which you prefer: that which will be above ground, or in the ground. Satan cried out: "I choose all that will be above ground."

"It's a bargain!" said the Saint. And he went away.

Six months later, all over the immense domain of the Devil, one could see nothing but carrots, turnips, onions, salsify, all the plants whose juicy roots are good and savoury, and whose useless leaves are good for nothing but for feeding animals.

Satan wished to break the contract, calling Saint Michel a swindler.

But the Saint, who had developed quite a taste for agriculture, went back to see the Devil, and said: "Really, I hadn't thought of that at all; it was just an accident, no fault of mine. And to make things fair with you, this year I'll let you take everything that is under the ground."

"Very well," answered Satan.

The following spring, all the Evil Spirit's lands were covered with golden wheat, oats as big as beans, linseed, magnificent colzas, red clover, peas, cabbage, artichokes, everything that blossoms into grains or fruit in the sunlight.

Once more Satan received nothing, and this time he completely lost his temper. He took back his

fields and remained deaf to all the new propositions of his neighbour.

A whole year rolled by. From the top of his lonely manor, Saint Michel looked at the distant and fertile lands, and watched the Devil direct the work, take in his crops, and thresh the wheat. And he grew angry, exasperated at his powerlessness. As he was no longer able to deceive Satan, he decided to wreak vengeance on him, and he went out to invite him to dinner for the following Monday.

"You have been very unfortunate in your dealings with me," he said; "I know it; but I don't want any ill feeling between us, and I expect you to dine with me. I'll give you some good things to eat."

Satan, who was as greedy as he was lazy, accepted eagerly. On the day which had been decided on, he donned his finest clothes and set out for the castle.

Saint Michel sat him down to a magnificent meal. First there was a *vol-au-vent,* full of cocks' crests and kidneys, with meat-balls, then two big *surmullets* with cream sauce, a turkey stuffed with chestnuts soaked in wine, some salt-marsh lamb as tender as possible, vegetables which melted in the mouth, and nice warm cake which was brought on smoking and spreading a delicious odour of butter.

They drank hard and sparkling cider, and red wine both flat and sparkling, and after each course more room was made with some old apple brandy.

The Devil drank and ate to his heart's content; in fact, he took so much that he found himself inconvenienced.

Then Saint Michel arose in anger, and cried, in a voice like thunder: "What! before me, rascal! you dare—before me——"

Satan, terrified, ran away, and the Saint, seizing a stick, pursued him. They ran around through the halls, turning around the pillars, running up the staircases, galloping along the cornices, jumping from gargoyle to gargoyle. The poor Demon, who was woefully ill, was running about madly and soiling the Saint's home. At last he found himself at the top of the last terrace, from which could be seen the immense bay, with its distant cities, sands, and passages. He could no longer escape, and the Saint came up behind him and gave him a furious kick, which shot him through space like a cannon-ball.

He shot through the air like a javelin and fell heavily before the town of Mortain. His horns and claws stuck deep into the rock, which keeps through eternity the traces of this fall of Satan's.

He stood up again, limping, crippled until the end of time, and as he looked at this fatal castle in the distance, standing out against the setting sun, he understood well that he would always be vanquished in this unequal struggle; and he went away limping, heading for distant countries, leaving to his enemy his fields, his hills, his valleys, and his marshes.

And this is how Saint Michel, the patron saint of Normandy, vanquished the Devil.

Another people would have dreamed of this battle in an entirely different manner.

A HUSBAND'S CONFESSION

WHEN Captain Hector-Marie de Fontenne married Mademoiselle Laurine d'Estelle, their relations and friends thought it would be an unhappy marriage.

Mademoiselle Laurine, pretty, slender, fair, and bold, at twelve years of age had as much self-assurance as a woman of thirty. She was one of those little precocious Parisiennes who seem to be born with all the worldly wisdom, all the little feminine tricks, all the emancipation of ideas, with that astuteness and suppleness of mind that seems to inevitably predestinate certain individuals in whatever they do to trick and deceive others. All their actions seem premeditated, all their proceedings a matter of calculation, all their words carefully weighed; their existence is only a part they play in a drama.

She was also charming; laughed readily, so readily that she could not restrain herself when a thing seemed amusing and humourous. She would laugh right in a person's face in the most impudent manner, but she did it so gracefully that no one ever grew angry.

She was rich, very rich. A priest served as go-

between in arranging her marriage with Captain de Fontenne. Brought up in a monastery in the most austere manner, this officer had taken with him into his regiment his monastic manners, very rigid principles, and absolute intolerance. He was one of those men who invariably become either saints or nihilists; men who are absolutely dominated by an ideal, whose beliefs are inflexible and their determination immovable.

He was a big, dark-haired young fellow, serious, severe, with an ingenuous mind, decided and obstinate, one of those men who pass through life without ever understanding its hidden meaning, its shadings and subtleties, who guess at nothing, suspect nothing, and will not allow any one to think differently, form a different opinion, believe or act differently from themselves.

Mademoiselle Laurine saw him, read his character at once, and accepted him as her husband.

They got along splendidly together. She was yielding, clever, and sensible, knowing how to act her part, and always ready to assist in good works, and on the occasion of festivals a constant attendant at church and at the theatre, worldly and strict, with a little ironiçal look, a twinkle in her eye when she chatted gravely with her husband. She told him about her charitable undertakings in association with all the priests of the parish and the environs, and she took advantage of this pious occupation to stay out of doors from morning till night.

But sometimes, in the midst of telling him about

some act of charity, she would suddenly go off into an idiotic laugh, a nervous laugh that she could not restrain. The captain was surprised, perplexed, a little shocked at seeing his wife suffocating with laughter. When she quieted down a little he asked: "What is the matter with you, Laurine?" She replied: "Nothing! I just happened to remember something funny that occurred." And she told him some story or other.

Well, in the summer of 1883 Captain Hector de Fontenne took part in the grand manœuvres of the Thirty-second Army Corps.

One evening, as they were encamped on the outskirts of a town, after ten days of tenting in the open field, ten days of fatigue and privations, the captain's comrades determined to have a good dinner.

Monsieur de Fontenne refused at first to form one of the party; then, as they seemed surprised at his refusal, he consented.

His neighbour at table, Commandant de Favré, while chatting about military operations, the only thing that interested the captain, kept filling up his glass with wine. It had been a very warm day, a heavy, dry heat that made one thirsty, and the captain drank without thinking, without noticing that gradually he was becoming filled with fresh vivacity, with a certain ardent joy, a happiness full of awakened desires, of unknown appetites, of vague hopes.

At dessert he was intoxicated. He talked, laughed, became restless, noisily drunk, with the

mad drunkenness of a man who is habitually quiet and sober.

It was proposed that they should finish up the evening at the theatre. He accompanied his friends. One of them recognized an actress whom he had been in love with, and they arranged a supper at which were present some of the actresses of the company.

The following day the captain awoke in a strange room, and a little, fair woman said, as she saw him open his eyes:

"Good morning, *mon gros chat!*"

He did not understand at first. Then, little by little, his memory returned, although it was a little indistinct.

Then he got up, without saying a word, dressed, and left the room, after emptying his purse out on the mantelpiece.

He was filled with shame when he stood up in his uniform, with his sword at his side, in this furnished room with its rumpled curtains, its shabby couch, and he was afraid to leave and go down the stairs, where he might meet the janitor, and, above all, he hated to go into the street where the neighbours and passers-by would see him.

The woman kept repeating: "What has happened to you? Have you lost your tongue? It was hung on wires last night, however! What a face!"

He bowed stiffly, and, having decided that he would leave the house, he returned home at a rapid pace, feeling convinced that every one could tell

from his manner, his behaviour, his face, where he had been.

He was filled with remorse, the tormenting remorse of an upright, scrupulous man.

He went to confession, took communion; but he was ill at ease, haunted by the remembrance of his fall and by the feeling of an indebtedness, a sacred indebtedness contracted against his wife.

He did not see her for a month, as she had gone to stay with her parents while the manœuvres lasted.

She came to him with open arms, a smile on her lips. He welcomed her with an embarrassed and guilty air, and avoided almost all conversation with her until evening.

As soon as they were alone she said:

"What is the matter with you, *mon ami?* I think you have changed very much."

"Nothing is the matter with me, my dear, absolutely nothing."

"Excuse me, I know you well, and I am sure that there is something, some anxiety, some sorrow, some annoyance, I know not what."

"Well, then, yes. I have some anxiety."

"Ah! what is it?"

"I cannot possibly tell you."

"Not tell me! Why? You make me uneasy."

"I can give you no reason. It is impossible for me to tell you."

She had sat down on a *causeuse,* and he was walking up and down the room, his hands behind his back, and avoided looking at his wife. She continued:

"Well, then, I shall have to make you confess; it is my duty, and I shall exact from you the truth; it is my right. You can no more have a secret from me than I can have one from you."

He said, as he turned his back to her and stood framed in the long window:

"My dear, there are certain things it is best not to tell. This thing that worries me is one of them."

She rose, walked across the room, and, taking him by the arm, made him turn round facing her; then, putting her two hands on his shoulders and smiling, she looked up in a caressing manner and said:

"Come, Marie" (she called him Marie in moments of tenderness), "you cannot hide anything from me. I shall imagine that you have done something wrong."

"I have done something very wrong," he murmured.

"Oh, is it as bad as that?" she said gayly. "As bad as that? I am very much astonished at you!"

"I will not tell you any more," he replied, with annoyance; "it is useless to insist."

But she drew him down on the armchair and made him sit down, while she sat on his right knee and gave him a little light kiss, a quick, flying kiss, on the curled tip of his moustache.

"If you will not tell me anything, we shall always be bad friends," she said.

Distracted with remorse and tortured with regret, he murmured:

"If I should tell you what I had done you would never forgive me."

"On the contrary, *mon ami,* I should forgive you at once."

"No, that is not possible."

"I swear I will forgive you."

"No, my dear Laurine, you never could."

"How simple you are, *mon ami,* not to say silly! In refusing to tell me what you have done you allow me to believe all sorts of abominable things; and I shall always be thinking of it, and be as much annoyed at your silence as at your unknown guilt. But if you were to speak to me frankly I should forget all about it by to-morrow."

"Well, then . . ."

"What?"

He reddened up to his ears, and said in a serious tone:

"I am going to confess to you as if I were confessing to a priest, Laurine."

The fleeting smile with which she sometimes listened to him now came to her lips, and she said, in a slightly mocking tone:

"I am all ears."

"You know, my dear," he resumed, "how sober I am. I never drink anything but water coloured with wine, and never any liqueurs, as you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, then, just imagine that at the end of the grand manœuvres I forgot myself, and drank a little one evening, as I was very thirsty, very tired, very exhausted, and . . ."

"You became intoxicated? Fie, that was very bad!"

"Yes, I became intoxicated."

She had assumed a severe look.

"Come, now, quite drunk, acknowledge it; so drunk you could not walk, tell the truth!"

"Oh, no; not as bad as that. I had lost my reason, but not my equilibrium. I chattered, I laughed, I was crazy."

He was silent, and she said:

"Is that all?"

"No."

"Oh! And then?"

"And then . . . I . . . did something disgraceful."

She looked at him, uneasy, a little disturbed and also touched.

"What was it, *mon ami?*"

"We had supper—with some actresses—and I do not know how it happened, but I was untrue to you, Laurine!"

He said all this in a solemn, serious tone.

She was slightly amazed, but her eye lighted up with sudden, intense, irresistible mirth. She said:

"You—you—you——"

And a little, dry, nervous, spasmodic laugh escaped her lips, interrupting her speech.

She tried to be serious; but each time she tried to utter a word a laugh began in her throat, was choked back, and came up again like the effervescence in a bottle of champagne that is just uncorked.

She put her hand to her mouth to calm herself, to keep back this untimely mirth; but her laughter ran through her fingers, shook her chest, and escaped in spite of herself. She stuttered:

"You—you—deceived me! Ha! ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!"

And she looked at him in a peculiar manner, with such a sneering expression that he was amazed, astonished.

Then, all at once, no longer restraining herself, she burst out laughing as if she had a nervous attack. She uttered little, short screams, which seemed to come from the bottom of her chest; and, placing her hands over her stomach, she gave way to long spasms of laughter, till she almost choked, just like spasms in whooping cough. And each time she tried to check them she laughed all the more, each word she tried to utter giving her a fresh spasm.

"My—my—my—poor friend . . . ha! ha! ha! . . . ha! ha! ha!"

He rose, leaving her seated in the chair, and, suddenly turning very pale, he said:

"Laurine, your behaviour is more than unbecoming."

She stuttered in the midst of her laughter:

"How—how can I—I—I help it . . . how funny you are—ha! ha! ha! ha!"

He became livid with anger, and looked at her now with a steady gaze in which a strange thought seemed to be awakened. All at once he opened his mouth, as if to say something, but said nothing,

and, turning on his heel, he went out, shutting the door behind him.

Laurine, bent double, exhausted and weak, was still laughing, with a faint laugh that revived every few moments like the embers of a fire that has almost burned out.

THE FATHERS

I HAVE a friend, Jean de Valnoix, whom I visit from time to time. He lives in a little cottage in the woods at the edge of a river. He retired from Paris after leading a wild life for fifteen years. Suddenly he had enough of pleasures, dinners, men, women, cards, everything; and he came to live in this little place where he had been born.

There are two or three of us who go, from time to time, to spend a few weeks with him. He is certainly delighted to see us when we arrive, and pleased to be alone again when we leave.

I went to see him last week, and he received me with open arms. We would spend hours at a time, sometimes together, sometimes alone. Usually he reads and I work during the daytime, and every evening we talk until midnight.

Well, last Tuesday, after a scorching day, toward nine o'clock in the evening we were both of us sitting and watching the water flow at our feet; we were exchanging very vague ideas about the stars which were bathing in the current and which seemed to swim along ahead of us. Our ideas were very vague, confused, and brief, for our minds are very limited, weak, and powerless. I was expatiat-

ing on the sun which dies in the Great Bear. One can only see it on very clear nights, it is so pale. When the sky is the least bit clouded it disappears. We were thinking of the creatures which people these worlds, of their possible forms, of their unthinkable faculties and unknown organs, of the animals and plants of every kind, of all the things which man's dreams can barely touch.

Suddenly a voice called from the distance: "Monsieur, Monsieur!"

Jean answered: "Here I am, Baptiste!"

When the servant had found us he announced: "It's Monsieur's gypsy."

My friend burst out laughing, a thing which he rarely did, then he asked: "Is to-day the nineteenth of July?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Very well. Tell her to wait for me. Give her some supper. I'll see her in ten minutes."

When the man had disappeared my friend took me by the arm, saying: "Let us walk along slowly, while I tell you this story.

"Seven years ago, when I arrived here, I went out one evening to take a walk in the forest. It was a beautiful day, like to-day, and I was walking along slowly under the great trees, looking at the stars through the leaves, drinking in the quiet restfulness of night and the forest.

"I had just left Paris forever. I was tired out, more disgusted than I can say by all the foolish, low, and nasty things which I had seen and in which I had participated for fifteen years.

"I walked along for a great distance in this deep forest, following a path which leads to the village of Crouzille, about eight miles from here.

"Suddenly my dog, a great St. Bernard, which never left me, stopped short and began to growl. I thought that perhaps a fox, a wolf, or a boar might be in the neighbourhood; I advanced gently on tip-toe, in order to make no noise, but suddenly I heard mournful, human cries, piercing yet muffled. I thought that surely some one was committing murder, and I rushed forward, taking a tight grip on my heavy oak cane, a regular club.

"I was coming nearer to the moans, which now became more distinct, but strangely muffled. One might have thought that they were coming from some house, perhaps from the hut of some charcoal burner. Three feet ahead of me Bock was running, stopping, barking, starting again, very excited, and always growling. Suddenly another dog, a big black one with snapping eyes, barred our progress. I could clearly see his white fangs, which seemed to be shining in his mouth.

"I ran toward him with uplifted cane, but Bock had already jumped, and the two beasts were rolling around the ground with their teeth buried in each other. I went past them and almost bumped into a horse lying in the road. As I stopped, in surprise, to examine the animal, I saw in front of me a wagon, or, rather, a rolling house, such as are inhabited by gypsies and the travelling merchants who go from fair to fair.

"The cries were coming from there, frightful

and continuous. As the door opened from the other side I turned around this vehicle and rushed up the three wooden steps, ready to jump on the male-factor.

"What I saw seemed so strange to me that I could at first understand nothing. A man was kneeling, and seemed to be praying, while in the bed something impossible to recognize, a half-naked creature, whose face I could not see, was moving, twisting about, and howling. It was a woman in labour.

"As soon as I understood the kind of an accident which was the cause of these screams, I made my presence known, and the man, wild with grief, begged me to save him, to save her, promising to me an unbelievable thankfulness. I had never seen a birth; I had never helped a female creature, woman, dog, or cat, in such a circumstance, and I said so as I foolishly watched this thing which was screaming so in the bed.

"Then I gathered my wits again, and I asked the grief-stricken man why he did not go to the next village. It seems that his horse had stepped into a rut and had broken part of his leg.

"'Well, my man,' I exclaimed, 'there are two of us now, and we will drag your wife to my house.'

"But the howling dogs forced us to go outside, and we had to separate them by beating them with our sticks, at the risk of killing them. Then the idea struck me to harness them with us, one to the right and the other to the left, in order to help us.

In ten minutes everything was ready, and the wagon started forward slowly, shaking the poor, suffering woman each time it would bump over a rut.

"Such a road, my friend! We were going along, panting, perspiring, slipping, and falling, while our poor dogs puffed along beside us.

"It took three hours to reach the cottage. When we arrived before the door the cries from the wagon had ceased. Mother and child were getting along well.

"They were put to bed, and then I had a horse harnessed up in order to go for a physician, while the man, an inhabitant of Marseilles, reassured, consoled, glorying, was stuffing himself with food and getting drunk in order to celebrate this happy birth.

"It was a girl.

"I kept these people with me for a week. The mother, Mademoiselle Elmire, was an extraordinarily lucid somnambulist, who promised me an interminable life and countless joys.

"The following year, at exactly the same date, toward nightfall, the servant who has just called me came to me in the smoking-room after dinner and said: 'It's the gypsy of last year who has come to thank Monsieur.'

"I had her come in the house, and I remained dumfounded as I saw beside her a tall blond fellow, a man from the North, who bowed and spoke to me as chief of the community. He had heard of my kindness for Mademoiselle Elmire, and he had not wished to let this anniversary go by without

bringing to me their thanks and a testimony of their gratefulness.

"I gave them supper in the kitchen, and offered them my hospitality for the night. They left the following day.

"The woman returns every year at the same date with the child, a fine little girl, and a new man . . . each time. One man only, a fellow from Auvergne, came back two years in succession. The little girl calls them all 'Papa,' just as one says 'Monsieur' with us."

We were arriving at the cottage, and we could barely distinguish three shadows standing on the porch, waiting for us. The tallest one took a few steps forward, made a great bow, and said: "Monsieur le Comte, we have come to-day in recognition of our gratefulness. . . ."

He was a Belgian!

After him, the little one spoke in the shrill, singing voice which children use when they recite a composition.

I played ignorance, and I took Mademoiselle Elmire to the side, and, after a few questions, I asked her: "Is that the father of your child?"

"Oh! no, Monsieur."

"Is the father dead?"

"Oh! no, Monsieur. We still see each other from time to time. He is a gendarme."

"What! then it wasn't the fellow from Marseilles who was there at the birth?"

"Oh! no, Monsieur. That was a rascal who stole all my savings."

"And the gendarme, the real father, does he know his child?"

"Oh! yes, Monsieur, and he loves her very much; but he can't take care of her because he has other ones from his wife."

ON CATS

I WAS sitting, the other day, on a bench outside of my door, with the sun shining full upon me, a basket of blooming anemones in front of me, reading a book that had recently appeared, a good book, a rare thing, and also a delightful book, *Le Tonnelier,* by Georges Duval. A large white cat, which belonged to the gardener, jumped on my knees, by the shock of its impact closing the book, which I laid beside me to caress the beast.

It was hot; the odour of young flowers, a shy, light, intermittent odour, floated in the air, and I also felt passing breaths of cold coming from those great white peaks that I saw in the distance.

But the sun was scorching, penetrating, with that heat which digs down into the earth and makes it alive, which splits the seeds in order to animate the sleeping germs within, and slits the buds, so that the young leaves may come out. The cat was rolling on its back, on my knees, with its paws extended, clawing the air, showing its pointed teeth inside of its lips, and its green eyes peeping out through the slit of its half-closed lids. I patted and caressed the soft and nervous animal, supple as a piece of silk, gentle, warm, delicious, and dangerous.

She was purring delightedly, and ready to bite, for she likes to claw, as well as to be caressed. She stretched and turned her neck, and when I stopped touching her, she sat up and passed her head under my raised hand.

I made her nervous and she made me nervous, too, for I both love and detest these charming and perfidious animals. It gives me pleasure to touch them, to pass my hand over their silky, crackling fur, to feel their warmth through the fine, exquisite texture of their coat. There is nothing softer than the warm and vibrant hair of a cat, and nothing imparts to the skin a more delicate, refined, and rare sensation. But this living coat makes my fingers itch with a strange and fierce desire to strangle the beast that I am caressing. I feel in her the inclination that she has to bite me and to tear me. I feel and I catch this inclination, like a fluid which she communicates to me; I catch it from this warm skin through the tips of my fingers, and it creeps along my nerves, along my limbs, up to my heart, up to my head; it fells me, it runs along my skin, and it makes me clinch my teeth. And all the while I feel at the tips of my ten fingers the light, lively tickling which penetrates and suffuses my body.

And if the beast begins, if she bites me or claws me, I take her by the neck, give a turn, and fling her away like a sling-stone, so quickly and so brutally that she never has the time to get even with me.

I remember that even as a child I loved cats, but yet with the brusque desire to strangle them in my

little hands. One day I suddenly saw, at the far end of the garden, on the edge of the woods, something gray that was rolling over in the tall grass. I ran down to see; it was a cat caught in a trap, who was strangling, with the death-rattle in its throat. It was twisting its body, clawing the earth round it, jumping up, and falling down; and then it began all over again, and its quick, hoarse breathing sounded like the noise of a pump, a dreadful noise that is still ringing in my ears.

I might have taken a spade and cut the trap; I might have run for our man-servant, or I might have gone to tell my father. But, no; I did not stir from the spot, and with beating heart and trembling and cruel joy I watched it die; for it was a cat. Had it been a dog I should have cut the wire string with my teeth, rather than let it suffer a moment longer.

And when the cat was dead, quite dead, and still warm, I went up to touch it and pull its tail.

Yet they are delicious, especially when, in caressing them, they rub against our skin, purr, and roll over us, looking at us with their yellow eyes which never seem to see us, and it is then that we feel the insecurity of their caresses, the perfidious egoism of their pleasure.

Women also give us this sensation, charming, gentle women, with clear and false eyes, who have chosen us in order to get a taste of love. With them, when they open their arms, with pursed-up lips, when one presses them close, with beating heart, when one tastes the sweet, sensual joy of

their tender caress, one feels very well that one is holding a cat, a cat with claws and nails, a perfidious, sly, amorous, hostile cat, who will bite when she is tired of kissing.

All the poets have loved cats. Baudelaire has sung of them divinely. We all know his admirable sonnet:

"Les amoureux fervents et les savants austères
Aiment également, dans leur mûre saison,
Les chats puissants et doux, orgueil de la maison,
Qui comme eux sont frileux, et comme eux sédentaires.

"Amis de la science et de la volupté,
Ils cherchent le silence et l'horreur des ténèbres.
L'Erèbe les eût pris pour des coursiers funèbres
S'ils pouvaient au servage incliner leur fierté.

"Ils prennent, en songeant, les nobles attitudes
Des grands sphinx allongés au fond des solitudes
Qui semblent s'endomir dans un rêve sans fin.

"Leurs reins féconds sont plein d'étincelles magiques,
Et des parcelles d'or, ainsi qu'un sable fin,
Etoilent vaguement leurs prunelles mystiques."

One day I had the strange sensation of having lived in the enchanted palace of the White Cat, a magical château, where ruled one of these sinuous, mysterious, troublous beasts, perhaps the only one of all the beings whose footfall one never hears.

It was last summer, on the same coast of the Mediterranean. There was a fierce heat at Nice, and I asked if the people here did not have somewhere in the mountain above a cool valley, where they could go for a breath of fresh air.

They told me of the valley of Thorence. I

wanted to see it. I must first go to Grasse, the city of perfumes, of which I shall speak some day, describing how they make those essences and quintessences of flowers, which are worth up to two thousand francs a litre. I passed the evening and the night in an old hotel in the city, a second-class inn, where the quality of the food was as doubtful as the cleanness of the rooms. I left in the morning.

The route lay through the mountains, skirting deep ravines, with sharp, sterile, and wild peaks rising up on the sides. I was wondering to what a curious summer place I had been sent, and I was on the point of turning back to get to Nice that same evening, when I suddenly perceived in front of me, on a mountain which seemed to shut off the entire valley, an immense and splendid ruin, with its towers and crumbled walls outlined against the sky, a curious heap of a dead fortress. It was the remains of an ancient priory of the Knights Templars, who formerly held sway in the country of Thorence.

Skirting this mountain, I suddenly discovered a long green valley, fresh and restful. In the bottom there were meadows, running water, and willows, and on the slope pines were climbing up to the sky.

Opposite the priory, on the further side of the valley, but lower, there stands the Château of Quatre Tours, which was built about 1530 and is still inhabited. Its architecture does not yet show any trace of the Renaissance.

It is a heavy and well-built pile of masonry, very

strong in appearance, and flanked by four watch-towers, as its name indicates.

I had a letter of introduction to the owners of this manor, who would not let me go on to the hotel.

The whole valley, which is really delightful, is one of the most charming summer places than one can imagine.

I went first through a kind of salon, the walls of which are covered by old Cordova leather, then through another room, where, by the light of my candle, I caught a glimpse of old portraits of ladies on the walls, those pictures of which Théophile Gautier has said:

> "I love to see you in your oval frames,
> Yellow portraits of the beauties of old,
> Holding somewhat pale roses in your hands,
> As is fitting for century-old flowers."

Then I entered the room in which I was to sleep.

I turned to examine it as soon as I was alone. It was hung with old painted tapestries, showing pink towers against blue backgrounds, and large, fantastic birds under foliage of precious stones.

My dressing-room was in one of the towers. The windows, which were cut large into the wall on the inside, sloped through the masonry, narrowing as they went out toward the daylight, being, in fact, nothing more than portholes, openings through which men on the outside were killed. I closed my door, lay down, and went to sleep.

And I dreamed; one always dreams somewhat

of that through which he has passed during the day. I was travelling; I entered an inn, where I saw at a table before the fire a servant in gala livery and a mason, a curious fellowship, but which did not astonish me. They were talking of Victor Hugo, who had just died, and I took part in their conversation. I finally went to bed in a room whose door did not close, and suddenly I saw the servant and the mason tiptoeing toward my bed, armed with bricks.

I started out of my sleep, and it took me some minutes to collect myself. Then I recalled the events of the day before, my arrival at Thorence, the *châtelain's* amiable reception. . . . I was about to close my eyes when I saw—yes, I saw in the darkness of the night, in the middle of my room, at about the height of a man's head, two fiery eyes looking at me.

I reached for a match, and while I was striking it I heard a noise, a slight, soft noise, like that of the dropping of a damp roll of cloth, and when I had made a light I saw nothing but a large table in the middle of the apartment.

I got up. I went through the two rooms, looked under my bed and into the closets, but found nothing.

I thought, therefore, that I had continued to dream for a few seconds after being awake, and I went to sleep again, not without some difficulty.

Again I began to dream. This time, also, I was travelling, but in the East, the land that I love, and I came to a Turk who was living in the open desert.

He was a splendid Turk; not an Arab, but a Turk, large, amiable, charming, dressed in Turkish fashion, with a turban and a whole assortment of silks on his back, a real Turk of the Théâtre Français, who made me compliments in offering me sweets, on a delicious divan.

Then a small negro boy led me to my room—so all my dreams finished there—a perfumed, sky-blue room, with skins on the floor, and before the fire—the idea of fire pursued me even to the desert—sat a scantily clad woman in a low chair, who was expecting me.

She was of the most pure Oriental type, with stars on the cheeks, the forehead, and chin, immense eyes, an admirable body, a little brown but warm and captivating.

She looked at me, and I thought: "This is what I call hospitality. It is not in our stupid land of the North, our land of inept prudishness and odious shamefacedness and imbecile morality, where one would receive a stranger in this fashion."

I went up to her and spoke, but she replied only by signs, not knowing a word of my language, which my Turk, her master, knew so well.

All the more happy in that she would be silent, I took her by the hand and led her to my couch, where I lay down beside her. . . . But one always awakens just at that point! So I woke up, and I was not very much surprised to feel something soft and warm under my hand, which I caressed amorously.

Then, on gathering together my thoughts, I saw

that it was a cat, a large cat, snuggled up against my cheek, which slept undisturbed. I let it lie, and, following its example, went to sleep once more.

When day broke it was gone, and I really thought that I had been dreaming, for I did not understand how she could have come into my room and gone out again, the door being locked.

When I told my adventure (not all of it) to my amiable host, he began to laugh, and said: "He came in through the cat-hole," and, lifting up a curtain, he showed me a small, round black hole in the wall.

And I learned that almost all the old habitations in this country have such long, narrow passages through the walls, which go from the cellar to the garret, from the maid-servant's room to that of the master, and which constitute the cat the king and the master of the house.

He goes about as he likes, visiting his domain at his pleasure; he can sleep in all the beds, see everything and hear everything, know all the secrets, all the habits, and all the shame of the house. He is everywhere at home, and can enter everywhere, the animal that goes about noiselessly, the silent prowler, the midnight promenader of hollow walls.

And I thought of this other verse of Baudelaire:

"He is the homely spirit of the spot;
As judge he sees us all, and doth inspire
All things that pass in his domain;
Perhaps he is a fay—perhaps a god."

MADAME PARISSE

I

I WAS sitting on the pier of the small port of Obernon, near the village of Salis, looking at Antibes, bathed in the setting sun. I had never before seen anything so surprising and so beautiful.

The small town, inclosed by its heavy, protective walls, built by Monsieur de Vauban, reached out into the open sea, in the middle of the immense Gulf of Nice. The great waves, coming in from the ocean, broke at its feet, surrounding it with a wreath of foam; and beyond the ramparts the houses were climbing up the hill, one over the other, as far as the two towers which rose up into the sky, like the horns of an ancient helmet. And these two towers were outlined against the milky whiteness of the Alps, that enormous distant wall of snow which closed in the entire horizon.

Between the white foam at the foot of the walls and the white snow on the sky-line the little city, resting brilliant against the bluish background of the nearest mountain ranges, presented to the rays of the setting sun a pyramid of red-roofed houses, whose façades were also white, but so different one from another that they seemed of all tints.

And the sky above the Alps was itself of a blue that was almost white, as if the snow had tinted it; some silvery clouds were floating just over the pale summits, and on the other side of the Gulf of Nice, down by the water, unrolled like a white thread between the sea and the mountain. Two great sails, driven by a strong breeze, seemed to skim over the waves. I looked upon all this, astounded.

This view was one of those things so sweet, so rare, so delightful, that penetrate into you, and are unforgettable, like the memories of a joy. One sees, thinks, suffers, is moved, and loves with the eyes. He who can feel with the eye experiences the same keen, exquisite, and deep pleasure in looking upon men and things as the man with the delicate and sensitive ear, whose soul music overwhelms.

I turned to my companion, M. Martini, a pure-blooded Southerner.

"This is certainly one of the rarest sights which it has been vouchsafed to me to admire.

"I have seen the Mont Saint-Michel, that monstrous granite jewel, rise out of the sand at sunrise.

"I have seen, in the Sahara, Lake Raianechergui, fifty kilometres long, shining under a moon as brilliant as our sun and breathing up to it a white cloud, like a mist of milk.

"I have seen, in the Liparian Islands, the fantastic sulphur crater of the Volcanello, a giant flower which fumes and burns, an over-big yellow flower, opening full on the sea, whose stem is a volcano.

"But I have seen nothing more surprising than Antibes, standing against the Alps at the setting sun.

"And I know not how it is that memories of antiquity haunt me; verses of Homer come into my mind; this is a city of the ancient East, a city out of the *Odyssey;* this is Troy, although Troy was very far from the sea."

M. Martini drew the Sarty guidebook out of his pocket and read: "This city was originally a colony founded by the Phocians of Marseilles, about 340 B. C. They gave it the Greek name of Antipolis, meaning counter-city, city opposite another, because it is in fact opposite to Nice, another colony from Marseilles.

"After the Gauls were conquered, the Romans turned Antibes into a municipal city, its inhabitants receiving the rights of Roman citizenship.

"We know by an epigram of Martial that at his time——"

I interrupted him:

"I don't care what she was. I tell you that I see down there a city out of the *Odyssey*. The coast of Asia and the coast of Europe resemble each other in their shores, and there is no city on the other coast of the Mediterranean which awakens in me the memories of the heroic times as this one does."

A footstep caused me to turn my head; a woman, a large, dark woman, was walking along the road which skirts the sea in going to the cape.

"That is Madame Parisse, you know," muttered Monsieur Martini, dwelling on the final syllable.

No, I did not know, but that name, pronounced nonchalantly, that name of the Trojan shepherd, confirmed me in my dream.

Yet I asked: "Who is this Madame Parisse?"

He seemed astonished that I did not know the story.

I assured him that I did not know it, and I looked after the woman, who passed by without seeing us, dreaming, walking with steady and slow step, as doubtless the ladies of old walked.

She was perhaps thirty-five years old, and still very beautiful, though a trifle stout.

And Monsieur Martini told me the following story:

II

Mademoiselle Combelombe was married, one year before the war of 1870, to Monsieur Parisse, a government official. She was then a handsome young girl, as slender and lively as she has now become stout and sad.

Unwillingly she had accepted Monsieur Parisse, one of those little fat men with short legs who trip along, with trousers always too large.

After the war Antibes was occupied by a single battalion commanded by Monsieur Jean de Carmelin, a young officer decorated during the war, and who had just received his four stripes.

As he found life exceedingly tedious in this fortress, this stuffy mole-hole inclosed by the enor-

mous double walls, he often strolled out to the cape, a kind of park or pine wood whipped by all the winds from the sea.

There he met Madame Parisse, who also came out in the summer evenings to get the fresh air under the trees. How did they love each other? Who knows? They met, they looked at each other, and when out of sight they doubtless thought of each other. The image of the young woman with the brown eyes, the black hair, the pale skin, this fresh, handsome Southerner, who displayed her teeth in smiling, was floating before the eyes of the officer as he continued with his promenade, biting his cigar instead of smoking; and the image of the commanding officer, in his close-fitting coat, covered with gold, and his red trousers, with a little blond moustache, would pass in the evening before the eyes of Madame Parisse, when her husband, half-shaven and ill-clad, short-legged and big-bellied, came home to supper.

Meeting so often, they perhaps smiled at the next meeting; then, seeing each other again and again, they thought that they knew each other. He certainly bowed to her. And she, surprised, bowed in return, but very, very slightly, just enough not to appear impolite. But after two weeks she returned his salutation away off, even before they were side by side.

He spoke to her. Of what? Doubtless of the setting sun. They admired it together, looking for it in each other's eyes more often than on the horizon. And every evening for two weeks this was

the commonplace and persistent pretext for a few minutes' chat.

Then they hazarded a few steps together, talking of anything that came along, but their eyes were already saying to each other a thousand more intimate things, those secret, charming things that are reflected in the gentle emotion of the eye, and that cause the heart to beat, for they are a better confession of the soul than the spoken word.

And then he would take her hand, murmuring those words which the woman divines, without seeming to hear them.

And it was agreed between them that they would love each other without making proof of it by anything sensual or brutal.

She would have remained indefinitely at this stage of intimacy, but he wanted more. And every day he urged her more hotly to give in to his violent desire.

She resisted, she did not want it, she seemed determined not to give way.

Yet one evening she said to him, casually: "My husband has just gone to Marseilles. He will be away four days."

Jean de Carmelin threw himself at her feet, imploring her to open her door to him that very night at eleven o'clock. But she would not listen to him and went home with angry mien.

The commander was in bad humour all the evening, and the next morning at dawn he went out on the ramparts in a rage, from one exercise field to the other, dealing out punishments to the

officers and men as one might fling stones into a crowd.

On coming back for his breakfast, he found an envelope under his napkin with these four words: "To-night at ten." And he gave one hundred sous off-hand to the waiter serving him.

The day seemed endless to him. He passed part of it in curling his hair and perfuming himself.

As he was sitting down to the dinner-table, another envelope was handed to him, and in it he found the following telegram:

"My Love: Business done. I return this evening on the nine o'clock train. Parisse."

The commander let loose such a big oath that the waiter dropped the soup-tureen on the floor.

What should he do? He certainly wanted her, that very evening, at whatever cost; and he would have her. He would resort to any means, even to arresting and imprisoning the husband. Then a mad thought struck him. Calling for paper, he wrote the following note:

"Madame: He will not come back this evening, I swear it to you, and I shall be where you know at ten o'clock. Fear nothing. I will answer for everything, on my honour as officer. Jean de Carmelin."

And, having sent off this letter, he calmly dined.

Toward eight o'clock he sent for Captain Gribois, the second in command, and he said, rolling between his fingers the crumpled telegram of Monsieur Parisse:

"Captain, I have just received a telegram of a very singular nature, which it is impossible for me to communicate to you. You will immediately have all the gates of the city closed and guarded, so that no one, mind me, no one, will either enter or leave before six in the morning. You will also have men patrol the streets, who will compel the inhabitants to retire to their houses at nine o'clock. And one found outside beyond that time will be conducted to his home *manu militari*. If your men meet me this night they will at once go out of my way, appearing not to know me. You understand me?"

"Yes, commander."

"Would you like to have a glass of Chartreuse?"

"With great pleasure, commander."

They clinked glasses, drank down the brown liquor, and Captain Gribois left the room.

III

THE train from Marseilles arrived at the station at nine o'clock sharp, left two passengers on the platform, and went on toward Nice.

One of them, tall and thin, was Monsieur Saribe, the oil merchant, and the other, short and fat, was Monsieur Parisse.

Together they set out, with their valises, to reach the city, one kilometre distant.

But on arriving at the gate of the port the guards crossed their bayonets, commanding them to retire.

Frightened, surprised, cowed with astonishment, they retired to deliberate; then, after having taken counsel one with the other, they came back cautiously to parley, giving their names.

But the soldiers evidently had strict orders, for they threatened to shoot; and the two scared travellers ran off, throwing away their valises, which impeded their flight.

Making the tour of the ramparts, they presented themselves at the gate on the route to Cannes. This likewise was closed and guarded by a menacing sentinel. Messrs. Saribe and Parisse, like the prudent men they were, desisted from their efforts, and went back to the station for shelter, since it was not safe to be near the fortification after sundown.

The station agent, surprised and somnolent, permitted them to stay till morning in the waiting-room.

And they sat there side by side, in the dark, on the green velvet sofa, too scared to think of sleeping.

It was a long and weary night for them.

At half-past six in the morning they were informed that the gates were open, and that people could now enter Antibes.

They set out for the city, but they failed to find their abandoned valises on the road.

When they passed through the gates of the city, still somewhat anxious, the Commandant de Carmelin, with sly glance and moustache turned up, came himself to look over and examine them.

Then he bowed to them politely, excusing himself for having caused them a bad night. But he had to carry out orders.

The people of Antibes were scared to death. Some spoke of a surprise planned by the Italians; others, of the landing of the Prince Imperial; and others, again, believed that there was an Orleanistic conspiracy. The truth was suspected only later, when it became known that the battalion of the commandant had been sent very far away, and that Monsieur de Carmelin had been severely punished.

IV

Monsieur Martini had finished his story. Madame Parisse returned, her promenade being terminated. She passed gravely near me, with her eyes fixed on the Alps, whose summits now gleamed rosy in the last rays of the setting sun.

I felt like saluting her, this poor, sad woman, who would ever be thinking of this night of love, now far distant, and of the bold man who for the sake of a kiss from her had dared to put a city into a state of siege and to compromise his whole future.

And to-day he had probably forgotten her, if he did not relate this audacious, comical, and tender farce to his comrades over the cups.

Had she seen him again? Did she still love him? And I thought: Here is an instance of modern

love, grotesque and yet heroic. The Homer to sing of this new Helena and the adventure of her Menelaus must be gifted with the soul of Paul de Kock. And yet the hero of this deserted woman was brave, daring, handsome, strong, like Achilles, and more cunning than Ulysses.

THE PENGUIN'S ROCK

THIS is the season for penguins.

From April to the end of May, before the Parisian visitors arrive, one sees, all at once, on the little beach at Etretat, several old men, booted and belted in shooting costume. They spend four or five days at the Hôtel Hanville, disappear, and return again three weeks later. Then, after a fresh sojourn, they go away altogether.

One sees them again the following spring.

These are the last gull hunters, what remain of the old set. There were about twenty enthusiasts thirty or forty years ago; now there are only a few of those enthusiastic sportsmen.

The penguin is a very rare bird of passage, with peculiar habits. It lives the greater part of the year in the latitude of Newfoundland and the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. But in the breeding season a flock of emigrants cross the ocean and come every year to the same spot to lay their eggs, to the Penguins' Rock, near Etretat. They are found nowhere else, only there. They have always come there, have always been chased away, but return again, and will always return. As soon as

the young birds are grown they all fly away and disappear for a year.

Why do they not go elsewhere? Why not choose some other spot on the long, white, unending cliff that extends from the Pas-de-Calais to Havre? What force, what invincible instinct, what custom of centuries impels these birds to come back to this place? What first migration, what tempest, possibly, once cast their ancestors on this rock? And why do the children, the grandchildren, all the descendants of the first parents, always return here?

There are not many of them, a hundred at most, as if one single family, maintaining the tradition, made this annual pilgrimage.

And each spring, as soon as the little wandering tribe has taken up its abode on the rock, the same sportsmen also reappear in the village. One knew them formerly when they were young; now they are old, but constant to the regular appointment which they have kept for thirty or forty years. They would not miss it for anything in the world.

* * * * * * *

It was an April evening in one of the later years. Three of the old sportsmen had arrived; one was missing—Monsieur d'Arnelles.

He had written to no one, given no account of himself. But he was not dead, like so many of the rest; they would have heard of it. At length, tired of waiting for him, the other three sat down to table. Dinner was almost over, when a carriage

drove into the yard of the hotel, and the late comer presently entered the dining-room.

He sat down, in a good humour, rubbing his hands, and ate with zest. When one of his comrades remarked, with surprise, at his being in a frock-coat, he replied quietly:

"Yes, I had no time to change my clothes."

They retired, on leaving the table, for they had to set out before daybreak in order to take the birds unawares.

There is nothing so pretty as this sport, this early morning expedition.

At three o'clock in the morning the sailors awoke the sportsmen by throwing sand against the windows. They were ready in a few minutes, and went down to the beach. Although it was still dark, the stars had paled a little. The sea ground the shingles on the beach. There was such a fresh breeze that it made one shiver slightly in spite of one's heavy clothing.

Presently two boats were pushed down the beach by the sailors with a sound as of tearing cloth, and were floated on the nearest waves. The brown sail was hoisted, swelled a little, fluttered, hesitated, swelled out again as round as a paunch, and carried the boats toward the large, arched entrance that could be faintly distinguished in the darkness.

The sky became clearer, the shadows seemed to melt away. The coast still seemed veiled, the great white coast, perpendicular as a wall.

They passed through the Manne-Porte, an enor-

mous arch beneath which a ship could sail; they doubled the promontory of La Courtine, passed the little valley of Antifer and the cape of the same name, and suddenly caught sight of a beach on which some hundreds of seagulls were perched.

That was the Seagulls' Rock. It was just a little protuberance of the cliff, and on the narrow ledges of rock the birds' heads might be seen watching the boats.

They remained there, motionless, not venturing to fly off as yet. Some of them perched on the edges seated upright looked almost like bottles, for their little legs are so short that when they walk they glide along as if they were on rollers. When they start to fly they cannot make a spring, and let themselves fall like stones almost down to the very men who are watching them.

They know their limitation and the danger to which it subjects them, and cannot make up their minds to fly away.

But the boatmen begin to shout, beating the sides of the boat with the wooden boat pins, and the birds, in affright, fly, one by one, into space until they reach the level of the waves. Then, moving their wings rapidly, they scud, scud along until they reach the open sea, if a shower of lead does not knock them into the water.

For an hour the firing is kept up, obliging them to give up, one after another. Sometimes the mother birds will not leave their nests, and are riddled with shot, causing drops of blood to spurt out

on the white cliff, and the animal dies without having deserted her eggs.

The first day Monsieur d'Arnelles fired at the birds with his habitual zeal; but when the party returned, toward ten o'clock, beneath a brilliant sun, which cast great triangles of light on the white cliffs along the coast, he appeared a little worried and absent-minded, contrary to his accustomed manner.

As soon as they got on shore a kind of servant dressed in black came up to him and said something in a low tone. He seemed to reflect, hesitate, and then replied:

"No; to-morrow."

The following day they set out again. This time Monsieur d'Arnelles frequently missed his aim, although the birds were close by. His friends teased him, asked him if he were in love, if some secret sorrow was troubling his mind and heart. At length he confessed:

"Yes, indeed. I have to leave soon, and that annoys me."

"What! you must leave? And why?"

"Oh, I have some business that calls me back. I cannot stay any longer."

They then talked of other matters.

As soon as breakfast was over the valet in black reappeared. Monsieur d'Arnelles ordered his carriage, and the man was leaving the room when the three sportsmen interfered, insisting, begging, and praying their friend to stay. One of them at last said:

"Come, now, this cannot be a matter of such importance, for you have already waited two days."

Monsieur d'Arnelles, altogether perplexed, began to think, evidently baffled, divided between pleasure and duty, unhappy and disturbed.

After reflecting for some time he stammered:

"The fact is—the fact is—I am not alone here. I have my son-in-law."

There were exclamations and shouts of:

"Your son-in-law! Where is he?"

He suddenly appeared confused, and his face grew red.

"What! Do you not know? Why—why—he is in the coach house. He is dead."

They were all silent, in amazement.

Monsieur d'Arnelles continued, more and more disturbed:

"I had the misfortune to lose him, and as I was taking the body to my house, in Briseville, I came round this way so as not to miss our appointment. But you can see that I cannot wait any longer."

Then one of the sportsmen, bolder than the rest, said:

"Well, but—since he is dead—it seems to me—that he can wait a day longer."

The others chimed in:

"That cannot be denied."

Monsieur d'Arnelles seemed to be relieved of a great weight; but a little uneasy, nevertheless, he asked:

"But frankly—do you think——"

The three others, as one man, replied:

"*Parbleu!* my dear boy, two days more or less can make no difference, in his present condition."

And, perfectly calmly, the father-in-law turned to the undertaker's assistant and said:

"Well, then, my friend, it will be the day after to-morrow."

MARTINE

IT came to him one Sunday after mass. He was walking home from church, along the hollow road that led to his house, when he saw ahead of him Martine, who was also going home.

Her father walked beside his daughter with the important gait of a wealthy farmer. Discarding the smock, he wore a short coat of gray cloth and on his head a round-topped hat with wide brim.

She, laced up in a corset which she wore only once a week, walked along erect, with her squeezed-in waist, her broad shoulders, and prominent hips, swinging herself a little. She wore a hat trimmed with flowers, made by a milliner at Yvetot, and displayed the back of her full, round, supple neck, reddened by the sun and air, on which fluttered little stray locks of hair.

Benoist saw only her back; but he knew well the face he loved, without, however, having ever noticed it more closely than he did now.

Suddenly he said: "*Nom d'un nom,* she is a fine girl, all the same, that Martine." He watched her as she walked, admiring her hastily, feeling a desire taking possession of him. He did not long to see her face again, no. He kept gazing at her

figure, repeating to himself: "*Nom d'un nom,* she is a fine girl."

Martine turned to the right, to enter "La Martinière," the farm of her father, Jean Martin; and she cast a glance behind her as she turned round. She saw Benoist, who looked to her very comical. She called out: "Good morning, Benoist." He replied: "Good morning, Martine; good morning, Mait' Martin," and went on his way.

When he reached home the soup was on the table. He sat down opposite his mother beside the farm-hand and the hired man, while the maid-servant went to draw some cider.

He ate a few spoonsful, then pushed away his plate. His mother said:

"Don't you feel well?"

"No, I feel as if I had some pap in my stomach, and that takes away my appetite."

He watched the others eating as he cut himself a piece of bread from time to time and carried it lazily to his mouth, masticating it slowly. He thought of Martine. "She is a fine girl, all the same." And to think that he had not noticed it before, and that it came to him, just like that, all at once, and with such force that he could not eat.

He did not touch the stew. His mother said:

"Come, Benoist, try to eat a little; it is loin of mutton; it will do you good. When one has no appetite, they should force themselves to eat."

He swallowed a few morsels, then, pushing away his plate, said:

"No. I can't go that, positively."

When they rose from table he walked round the farm, telling the farm-hand he might go home, and that he would drive up the animals as he passed them.

The country was deserted, as it was the day of rest. Here and there, in a field of clover, cows were moving along heavily, with full bellies, chewing their cud under a blazing sun. Unharnessed plows were standing at the end of a furrow, and the upturned earth ready for the seed showed broad, brown patches amid yellow patches of stubble of wheat and oats that had lately been harvested.

A rather dry autumn wind blew across the plain, promising a cool evening after the sun had set. Benoist sat down on a ditch, placed his hat on his knees as if he needed to cool off his head, and said aloud in the stillness of the country: "If you want a fine girl, she is a fine girl."

He thought of it again at night, in his bed, and in the morning when he awoke.

He was not sad, he was not discontented, he could not have told what ailed him. It was something that had hold of him, something fastened in his mind, an idea that would not leave him and that produced a sort of tickling sensation in his heart.

Sometimes a big fly is shut up in a room. You hear it flying about, buzzing, and the noise haunts you, irritates you. Suddenly it stops; you forget it; but all at once it begins again, obliging you to look up. You cannot catch it, nor drive it away, nor kill

it, nor make it keep still. As soon as it settles for a second it starts off buzzing again.

The recollection of Martine disturbed Benoist's mind like an imprisoned fly.

Then he longed to see her again, and walked past the Martinière several times. He saw her, at last, hanging out some clothes on a line stretched between two apple trees.

It was a warm day. She had on only a short skirt and her chemise, showing the curves of her figure as she hung up the towels. He remained there concealed by the hedge for more than an hour, even after she had left. He returned home more obsessed with her image than ever.

For a month his mind was full of her, he trembled when her name was mentioned in his presence. He could not eat, he had night sweats that kept him from sleeping.

On Sunday, at mass, he never took his eyes off her. She noticed it, and smiled at him, flattered at his appreciation.

One evening he suddenly met her in the road. She stopped short when she saw him coming. Then he walked right up to her, choking with fear and emotion, but determined to speak to her. He began falteringly:

"See here, Martine, this cannot go on like this any longer."

She replied, as if she wanted to tease him:

"What cannot go on any longer, Benoist?"

"My thinking of you as many hours as there are in the day," he answered.

She put her hands on her hips.

"I do not oblige you to do so."

"Yes, it is you," he stammered; "I cannot sleep, nor rest, nor eat, nor anything."

"What do you need to cure you of all that?" she asked.

He stood there in dismay, his arms swinging, his eyes staring, his mouth agape.

She hit him a punch in the stomach, and ran off.

From that day they met each other along the roadside, in byroads, or else at twilight on the edge of a field, when he was going home with his horses and she was driving her cows home to the stable.

He felt himself carried, cast toward her by a strong impulse of his heart and body. He would have liked to squeeze her, strangle her, eat her, make her part of himself. And he trembled with impotence, impatience, rage, to think she did not belong to him entirely, as if they were one being.

People gossiped about it in the countryside. They said they were engaged. He had, however, asked her if she would be his wife, and she had answered: "Yes."

They were waiting for an opportunity to talk to their parents about it.

But all at once she stopped coming to meet him at the usual hour. He did not even see her as he wandered round the farm. He could only catch a glimpse of her at mass on Sunday. And one Sunday, after the sermon, the priest actually published the banns of marriage between Victoire-Adelaide Martin and Josephin-Isidore Vallin.

Benoist felt a sensation in his hands as if the blood had been drained off. He had a buzzing in the ears, and could hear nothing; and presently he perceived that his tears were falling on his prayer book.

For a month he stayed in his room. Then he went back to his work.

But he was not cured, and it was always in his mind. He avoided the roads that led past her home, so that he might not even see the trees in the yard, and this obliged him to make a great circuit morning and evening.

She was now married to Vallin, the richest farmer in the district. Benoist and he did not speak now, though they had been comrades from childhood.

One evening, as Benoist was passing the town hall, he heard that she was *enceinte.* Instead of experiencing a feeling of sorrow, he experienced, on the contrary, a feeling of relief. It was over now, all over. They were more separated by that than by her marriage. He really preferred that it should be so.

Months passed, and more months. He caught sight of her occasionally going to the village with a heavier step than usual. She blushed as she saw him, lowered her head, and quickened her pace. And he turned out of his way so as not to pass her and meet her glance.

He dreaded the thought that he might one morning meet her face to face and be obliged to speak to her. What could he say to her now after all he

had said formerly when he held her hands as he kissed her hair beside her cheeks? He often thought of those meetings along the roadside. She had acted horribly after all her promises.

By degrees his grief diminished, leaving only sadness behind. And one day he took the old road that led past the farm where she now lived. He looked at the roof from a distance. It was there, in there, that she lived, with another! The apple trees were in bloom, the cocks crowed on the dunghill. The whole dwelling seemed empty, the farmhands had gone to the fields to their spring toil. He stopped near the gate and looked into the yard. The dog was asleep outside his kennel. Three calves were walking slowly, one behind the other, toward the pond. A big turkey was strutting before the door, parading before the turkey hens like a singer at the opera.

Benoist leaned against the gatepost and was suddenly seized with a desire to weep. But suddenly he heard a cry, a loud cry for help, coming from the house. He was struck with dismay, his hands grasping the wooden bars of the gate, and listened attentively. Another cry, a prolonged, heartrending cry, reached his ears, his soul, his flesh. It was she who was crying like that! He darted inside, crossed the grass patch, pushed open the door, and saw her lying on the floor, her body drawn up, her face livid, her eyes haggard, in the throes of childbirth.

He stood there, trembling and paler than she was, and stammered:

"Here I am, here I am, Martine!"

She replied in gasps:

"Oh, do not leave me, do not leave me, Benoist!"

He looked at her, not knowing what to say, what to do. She began to cry out again:

"Oh! oh! it is killing me. Oh, Benoist!"

She writhed frightfully.

Benoist was suddenly seized with a frantic longing to help her, to quiet her, to remove her pain. He leaned over, lifted her up, and laid her on her bed; and while she kept on moaning he began to take off her clothes, her jacket, her skirt, and her petticoat. She bit her fists to keep from crying out. Then he did as he was accustomed to doing for cows, ewes, and mares; he assisted in delivering her, and found in his hands a large infant, who was moaning.

He wiped it off and wrapped it up in a towel that was drying in front of the fire, and laid it on a bundle of clothes ready for ironing that was on the table. Then he went back to the mother.

He took her up and placed her on the floor again, then he changed the bedclothes and put her back into bed. She faltered:

"Thank you, Benoist; you have a noble heart." And then she wept a little, as if she felt regretful.

He did not love her any more, not the least bit. It was all over. Why? How? He could not have said. What had happened had cured him better than ten years of absence.

She asked, exhausted and trembling:

"What is it?"

He replied calmly:

"It is a very fine girl."

Then they were silent again. At the end of a few seconds the mother, in a weak voice, said:

"Show her to me, Benoist."

He took up the little one and was showing it to her as if he were holding the consecrated wafer, when the door opened and Isidore Vallin appeared.

He did not understand at first; then, all at once, he guessed.

Benoist, in consternation, stammered out:

"I was passing, I was just passing by when I heard her crying out, and I came—there is your child, Vallin!"

Then the husband, his eyes full of tears, stepped forward, took the little mite of humanity that he held out to him, kissed it, unable to speak from emotion for a few seconds; then, placing the child on the bed, he held out both hands to Benoist, saying:

"Your hand upon it, Benoist. From now on we understand each other. If you are willing, we will be a pair of friends, a pair of friends!"

And Benoist replied:

"Indeed I will; certainly; indeed, I will."

A SALE

THE defendants, Césaire-Isidore Brument and Prosper-Napoléon Cornu, appeared before the Court of Assizes of the Seine-Inférieure on a charge of attempted murder, by drowning, of Madame Brument, lawful wife of the first of the afore-named.

The two prisoners sat side by side on the traditional bench. They were two peasants; the first was small and stout, with short arms, short legs, and a round head, with a red, pimply face planted directly on his trunk, which was also round and short, and with apparently no neck. He was a raiser of pigs, and lived at Cacheville-la-Goupil, in the Canton of Criquetot.

Cornu (Prosper-Napoléon) was thin, of medium height, with enormously long arms. His head was on crooked, his jaw awry, and he squinted. A blue blouse, as long as a shirt, hung down to his knees, and his yellow hair, which was scanty and plastered down on his head, gave his face a worn-out, dirty look, a ruined look that was frightful. He had been nicknamed "the *curé*," because he could imitate to perfection the chanting in church and even the sound of the serpent. This talent attracted to his café—for he was a saloon keeper at Criquetot—a

great many customers who preferred the "mass at Cornu" to the mass in church.

Madame Brument, seated on the witness bench, was a thin peasant woman, who seemed to be always asleep. She sat there motionless, her hands crossed on her knees, gazing fixedly before her with a stupid expression.

The Judge continued his interrogation:

"Well, then, Madame Brument, they came into your house and threw you into a barrel full of water. Tell us the details. Stand up."

She rose. She looked as tall as a flagpole, with her cap, which appeared like a white skull cap. She said, in a drawling tone:

"I was shelling beans. Just then they came in. I said to myself: 'What is the matter with them? They do not seem natural; they seem up to some mischief.' They watched me sideways, like this, especially Cornu, because he squints. I do not like to see them together, for they are two good-for-nothings when they are in company. I said: 'What do you want with me?' They did not answer. I had a sort of mistrust——"

The defendant Brument interrupted the witness hastily, saying:

"I was full."

Then Cornu, turning toward his accomplice, said, in the deep tones of an organ:

"Say that we were both full, and you will be telling no lie."

The Judge, severely: "You mean by that you were both drunk?"

Brument: "There can be no question about it."

Cornu: "That might happen to any one."

The Judge, to the victim: "Continue your testimony."

"Well, Brument said to me, 'Do you wish to earn a hunded sous?' 'Yes,' I replied, 'seeing that a hundred sous are not picked up in a horse's tracks.' Then he said: 'Open your eyes and do as I do,' and he went to fetch the large empty barrel which is under the rain pipe in the corner, and he turned it over and brought it into my kitchen, and stuck it down in the middle of the floor, and then he said to me: 'Go and fetch water until it is full.'

"So I went to the pond with two pails and carried water, and still more water for an hour, seeing that the barrel was as large as a vat, saving your presence, Monsieur le Président.

"All this time Brument and Cornu were drinking a glass, and then another glass, and then another. They were finishing their drinks when I said to them: 'You are full, fuller than this barrel.' And Brument answered me: 'Do not worry; go on with your work; your turn will come; each one has his share.' I paid no attention to what he said, and he was full.

"When the barrel was full to the brim, I said: 'There, that's done.'

"And then Cornu gave me a hundred sous. Not Brument, Cornu; it was Cornu gave them to me. And Brument said: 'Do you wish to earn a hundred sous more?' 'Yes,' I said, for I am not

accustomed to presents like that. Then he said: 'Take off your clothes.'

"'Take off my clothes?'

"'Yes,' he said.

"'How many shall I take off?'

"'If it worries you at all, keep on your chemise, that won't bother us.'

"A hundred sous, that is a hundred sous, and I have to undress myself, but I did not fancy undressing before those two good-for-nothings. I took off my cap, and then my jacket, and then my skirt, and then my sabots. Brument said: 'Keep on your stockings, also; we are good fellows.'

"And Cornu said, too: 'We are good fellows.'

"So there I was, almost like Mother Eve. And they got up from their chairs, but could not stand straight, they were so full, saving your presence, Monsieur le Président.

"I said to myself: 'What are they up to?'

"And Brument said: 'Are you ready?'

"And Cornu said: 'I'm ready!'

"And then they took me, Brument by the head and Cornu by the feet, as one might take, for instance, a sheet that has been washed. Then I began to bawl.

"And Brument said: 'Keep still, wretched creature.'

"And they lifted me up in the air and put me into the barrel which was full of water, so that I had a check of the circulation, a chill to my very insides.

"And Brument said: 'Is that all?'

"Cornu said: 'That is all.'

"Brument said: 'The head is not in; that will make a difference in the measure.'

"Cornu said: 'Put in her head.'

"And then Brument pushed down my head as if to drown me, so that I could already see Paradise. And he pushed it down, and I disappeared.

"And then he must have been frightened. He pulled me out and said: 'Go and get dry, carcass.'

"As for me, I took to my heels and ran as far as Monsieur le Curé's. He lent me a skirt belonging to his servant, for I was almost in a state of nature, and he went to fetch Maître Chicot, the country watchman, who went to Criquetot to fetch the police, who came to my house with me.

"There we found Brument and Cornu fighting each other like two rams.

"Brument was bawling: 'It isn't true; I tell you that there is at least a cubic metre in it. It is the method that was no good.'

"Cornu bawled: 'Four pails, that is almost half a cubic metre. You need not reply, that's what it is.'

"The police captain put them both under arrest. I have no more to tell."

She sat down. The audience in the courtroom laughed. The jurors looked at one another in astonishment. The Judge said:

"Defendant Cornu, you seem to have been the instigator of this infamous plot. What have you to say?"

And Cornu rose in his turn.

"Judge," he replied, "I was full."

The Judge answered gravely:

"I know it. Proceed."

"I will. Well, Brument came to my place about nine o'clock, and ordered two drinks, and said: 'Here's one for you, Cornu.' I sat down opposite him and drank, and, out of politeness, I offered him a glass. Then he returned the compliment and so did I, and so it went on from glass to glass until noon, when we were full.

"Then Brument began to cry. That touched me. I asked him what was the matter. He said: 'I must have a thousand francs by Thursday.' That cooled me off a little, you understand. Then he said to me all at once: 'I will sell you my wife.'

"I was full, and I was a widower. You understand, that stirred me up. I did not know his wife, but she was a woman, wasn't she? I asked him: 'How much would you sell her for?'

"He reflected, or pretended to reflect. When one is full one is not very clear-headed, and he replied: 'I will sell her by the cubic metre.'

"That did not surprise me, for I was as drunk as he was, and I knew what a cubic metre is in my business. It is a thousand litres. That suited me.

"But the price remained to be settled. All depends on the quality. I said: 'How much do you want a cubic metre?'

"He answered: 'Two thousand francs.'

"I gave a bound like a rabbit, and then I re-

flected that a woman ought not to measure more than three hundred litres, so I said: 'That's too dear.'

"He answered: 'I cannot do it for less. I should lose by it.'

"You understand one is not a dealer in hogs for nothing. One understands one's business. But if he is smart, the seller of bacon, I am smarter, seeing that I sell them, also. Ha! ha! ha! So I said to him: 'If she were new I would not say anything, but she has been married to you for some time, so she is not as fresh as she was. I will give you fifteen hundred francs a cubic metre, not a sou more. Will that suit you?'

"He answered: 'That will do. That's a bargain!'

"I agreed, and we started out, arm in arm. We must help each other in this world.

"But a fear came to me: 'How can you measure her unless you put her into the liquid?'

"Then he explained his idea, not without difficulty, for he was full. He said to me: 'I take a barrel and fill it with water to the brim. I put her in it. All the water that comes out we will measure; that is the way to fix it.'

"I said: 'I see, I understand. But this water that overflows will run away; how are you going to gather it up?'

"Then he began stuffing me, and explained to me that all we should have to do would be to refill the barrel with the water his wife had displaced as soon as she should have left. All the water we

should pour in would be the measure. I supposed about ten pails; that would be a cubic metre. He isn't a fool, all the same, when he is drunk, that old horse.

"To be brief, we reached his house, and I took a look at its mistress. A beautiful woman she certainly was not. Any one can see her, for there she is. I said to myself: 'I am disappointed, but never mind, she will be of value; handsome or ugly, it is all the same, is it not, Monsieur le Président?' And then I saw that she was as thin as a rail. I said to myself: 'She will not measure four hundred litres.' I understand the matter, it being in liquids.

"She told you about the proceeding. I even let her keep on her chemise and stockings, to my own disadvantage.

"When that was done she ran away. I said: 'Look out, Brument! she is escaping.'

"He replied: 'Do not be afraid, I will catch her, all right. She will have to come back to sleep. I will measure the deficit.'

"We measured. Not four pailfuls. Ha! ha! ha!"

The witness began to laugh so persistently that a gendarme was obliged to punch him in the back. Having quieted down, he resumed:

"In short, Brument exclaimed: 'Nothing doing; that is not enough.' I bawled, and bawled, and bawled again; he punched me, I hit back. That would have kept on till the Day of Judgment, seeing we were both drunk.'

"Then came the gendarmes! They swore at us, they took us off to prison. I want damages."

He sat down.

Brument confirmed in every particular the statements of his accomplice. The jury, in consternation, retired to deliberate.

At the end of an hour they returned a verdict of acquittal for the defendants, with some severe strictures on the dignity of marriage, and establishing the precise limitations of business transactions.

Brument went home to the domestic roof accompanied by his wife.

Cornu went back to his business.

THE ODYSSEY OF AN OUTCAST

THE remembrance of that evening can never be blotted out. For half an hour I had the sinister feeling of an invincible fate; I felt the shudder that one experiences in going down into a mine. I touched the black abyss of human misery; I understood how impossible an honest life is for some persons.

It was past midnight. I was returning from the Vaudeville to the Rue Drouot, walking rapidly along the boulevard, where umbrellas were hurrying to and fro. A fine, powdery rain was flying, rather than falling, dimming the gaslights and giving the street a melancholy appearance. The pavement glistened and was more sticky than wet. People hurried along, paying no attention to anything.

Women, with their skirts raised, showing their white stockings, stood in doorways trying to attract passers-by, or else, brushing past them, would whisper some stupid words in their ear. They would follow a man, sidling up to him, their putrid breath blowing in his face; then, finding their words were in vain, they would leave him abruptly and in anger, and resume their course, swinging their hips.

I walked along, appealed to on all sides, taken by

the sleeve, tormented and filled with disgust. All at once I saw three of them running, as if they were mad, and exchanging rapid remarks. Then others began to run, to flee, holding their dresses up with both hands so that they could run better. The drag-net was out that evening for that class of women.

Suddenly I felt some one take my arm, while a distracted voice murmured in my ear: "Save me, sir, save me; do not leave me."

I looked at the girl. She was not twenty, although she was quite faded. I said to her:

"Stay with me."

"Oh, thank you," she murmured.

We reached the line of republican guards. They made an opening to let me pass.

I turned into the Rue Drouot. My companion asked me:

"Are you coming home with me?"

"No."

"Why not? You did me a kindness that I can never forget."

"Because I am married," I replied, in order to get rid of her.

"What do I care?"

"Come, my child, that will do. I helped you out of a difficulty. Let me alone now."

The street was dark and deserted, sinister, in fact. And this woman who was squeezing my arm only intensified the feeling of sadness that pervaded me. She wanted to kiss me. I recoiled in horror, and said in a hard tone:

"Come, let me alone, do you hear?"

She made an angry gesture, and then suddenly began to sob. I was dismayed, moved, without understanding.

"Come, what ails you?"

She murmured amid her tears:

"If you knew; it is not cheerful, you may be sure."

"What?"

"This life."

"Why did you choose it?"

"Was it my fault?"

"Whose fault was it, then?"

"I know!"

A kind of interest was aroused in me by this wretched creature.

"Tell me your history," I said.

And she told it.

"I was sixteen, and was in service at Yvetot, with Monsieur Lerable, a grain merchant. My parents were dead. I had no relatives. I saw that my master looked at me in a queer manner, and pinched my cheeks, but I paid no attention to him. I knew about things, of course; in the country people are shrewd. But Monsieur Lerable was a pious old fellow who went to mass every Sunday. I would never have suspected him, in fact.

"One day he tried to take advantage of me in the kitchen, but I resisted him, and he went off.

"Opposite us was a grocer, Monsieur Dutan, who had a boy in the store who was very pleasant; so much so that I let him talk me over. I left the door open and he came to see me in the evening.

"But one night Monsieur Lerable heard a noise and came upstairs. He found Antoine, and wanted to kill him. They fought with chairs, with water pitchers, with everything. I seized some clothes and rushed into the street. And I was off.

"I was terrified, as terrified as a hare. I put on my wraps in a doorway, and then I started to walk straight ahead of me. I was sure that some one was killed and that the police were already looking for me. I took the highroad to Rouen. I thought I could hide myself very well in Rouen.

"It was so dark that I could not see the ditches, and I heard the dogs barking on the farms. No one knows all the sounds one hears at night. Birds who scream like men whose throats are being cut, creatures that hiss, and lots of things that one cannot understand. It made my flesh creep, and at each sound I made the sign of the cross. You cannot imagine how it makes your heart beat. When day began to dawn the thought of the gendarmes took possession of me again, and I began to run. Then I quieted down.

"I felt hungry, although I was so upset; but I had nothing, not a sou. I had forgotten my money, all that I had in the world, eighteen francs. So I walked along with an empty stomach. It was warm. The sun burned me. Noon passed. I was still walking.

"All at once I heard horses behind me. I turned round. The gendarmes! My blood stopped circulating; I thought I was going to fall. But I controlled myself. They came up with me. They

looked at me. One of them, the oldest among them, said:

"'Good morning, Mamzelle.'

"'Good morning, sir.'

"'Where are you going like that?'

"'I am going to Rouen to service in a place that was offered me.'

"'What! on foot?'

"'Yes, just as I am.'

"My heart beat, sir, so that I could not speak any more. I said to myself: 'They've caught me.' And my legs twitched with a longing to run away. But they would have caught me at once, you understand.

"The older man said:

"'We will go along together as far as Barantin, Mamzelle, seeing that we both take the same road.'

"'With pleasure, sir.'

"And we began to chat. I made myself as agreeable as I could, naturally; so much so that they surmised things that were not true. But when we were passing a wood the older man said:

"'Would you like to go and sit down on the moss to rest, Mamzelle?'

"Without thinking, I replied:

"'If you wish it, sir.'

"He dismounted and gave his horse to the other to hold, and we went into the wood together.

"I could say nothing. What would you have done in my place? After some time he said: 'We must not forget my comrade.' And he went back to hold the horses. I was so ashamed that I could

have cried. But I did not dare to be obstinate. You understand.

" So we set off again. I did not speak, my heart was too sad. And I could not walk any longer, I was so hungry. In a village they gave me a glass of wine, which gave me strength for a little while. And then they began to trot their horses so that we should not be seen together in going through Barantin. Then I sat down by the side of the road and cried all the tears I had.

" I walked three hours longer before reaching Rouen. It was seven in the evening when I got there. At first all the lights bewildered me. And I had no place to sit down. On the highroad there is the ditch, and grass where one could even lie down and go to sleep. But in towns there is nothing.

" My legs seemed to be driven into my body and I was so dizzy that I thought I should fall. Then it began to rain, a little fine rain, like this evening, which looks like nothing, but penetrates you. I have no luck when it rains. Well, I began to walk about the streets. I looked at all the houses, saying to myself:

" ' There are so many beds and so much bread in there, and I cannot even find a crust and a straw mattress.' I chose the streets where there were women calling to men passing by. In such cases, Monsieur, one has to do what one can. I did as they did, inviting every one, but without any luck. I wished I was dead. This lasted till midnight. At last a man listened to me. He said: ' Where do

you live?' One becomes cunning when it is necessary, and I replied: 'I cannot take you to my house, for I live with my mother.'

"He reflected a while, and then said: 'Come along, I know a quiet place.'

"He took me across a bridge and then to the end of the town to a meadow beside the river. I was too tired to go any farther.

"He made me sit down, and we began to talk. But he talked so long that I fell asleep. He went off without giving me anything. It was raining, as I said. And from that day I have pains that I cannot get rid of, for I slept all that night in the mud.

"I was awakened by two police officers, who took me to the station house, and from there to prison, where I stayed a week, while they were looking up my record. I would tell nothing, for fear of the consequences. They found out, however, and set me at liberty after acquitting me. I had now to begin looking for something to eat again. I tried to get a place as a servant, but did not succeed, as I had been in prison.

"Then I recalled an old Judge who had glanced at me after the fashion of old Lerable, of Yvetot, while he was hearing my case. I went to see him. I was not mistaken. He gave me a hundred sous when I left, and said: 'You shall have the same every time; but do not come oftener than twice a week.'

"I understood that, as he was old. But it made me think. I said to myself: 'Young people amuse themselves, but they are not coarse. But old men

are different.' I understood them now, the old apes, with their grooved eyes and their little wizened heads.

"Do you know what I did, Monsieur? I dressed myself like a nursemaid coming from market, and I walked about the streets looking for my nurslings. Oh, I caught them at the first throw. I said: 'Here is one who will bite.' He approached. He began:

"'Good morning, Mamzelle.'

"'Good morning, sir.'

"'Where are you going like that?'

"'I am going home to my masters.'

"'Do they live far off, your masters?'

"'Oh, so so.'

"Then he did not know what more to say. I slackened my pace in order to let him explain himself.

"Then he paid me some compliments in a low tone and asked me to go home with him. I kept him begging me, you understand, and then I yielded. I had others like him in the morning, and all my afternoons free. That was the good time of my life. I did not have to worry.

"But, there! One is never quiet for any length of time. As ill-luck would have it, I made the acquaintance of a rich old society man, a former Judge, who was at least seventy-five.

"One evening he took me to dine at a restaurant in the suburbs. And then, you understand, he could not restrain himself. He died during dessert.

"I had three months of prison, for I was not under inspection.

"It was then that I came to Paris. Oh, it is hard living here, Monsieur. One does not eat every day. There are too many. Well, it cannot be helped; all have their own troubles, have they not?"

She was silent. I walked along beside her, my heart aching. All at once she began to call me "thou."

"Well, then, dear, you will not come home with me?"

"No; I told you so already."

"Well, then, good-by; thank you, all the same, without any grudge. But I assure you, you are making a mistake."

And she left me, and was soon out of sight in the misty rain. I saw her pass beneath a gas-lamp, and then disappear in the shadow. Poor girl!

BOMBARD

SIMON BOMBARD frequently found life very trying. He was born with an incredible aptitude for idleness and an immoderate desire to avoid thwarting this tendency. Every moral or physical exertion, anything in the nature of work, seemed to him to be too great an effort for his strength. As soon as any serious topic was touched on his attention wandered, his mind being incapable of any strain or even any attention.

His father had a notion store at Caen, and the son had taken life easy, as his family said, until he was twenty-five.

But his parents were always nearer failing than making a fortune, and he suffered dreadfully from lack of money.

He was a big, handsome fellow, with red whiskers cut in the Norman fashion, with a florid complexion, blue eyes with a happy, stupid expression, and already beginning to have a corporation, and dressed himself with the loud elegance of a provincial in holiday attire. He laughed, vociferated, gesticulated at everything that was said, displaying his boisterous good humour with the assurance of a travelling man. He considered that life was meant

solely for joking or buffoonery, and as soon as he had to restrain his noisy mirth he fell into a condition of stupid sleepiness, not being capable even of sadness.

His lack of money worried him, and he was in the habit of repeating a saying that became known to all his friends:

"If I had ten thousand francs a year I would be an executioner."

Every year he spent two weeks at Trouville, and called that "spending the season." He stayed with his cousins, who let him have a room, and from the day of his arrival to the day of his departure he walked up and down the board walk along the beach.

He walked with a firm step, his hands in his pockets or behind his back, always wearing roomy clothes, light waistcoats, and loud neckties, with his hat on one side and a penny cigar in the corner of his mouth.

He passed close beside well-dressed women, looking at the men with the air of a young fellow ready to pick a quarrel, and seeking—seeking—for he was seeking something.

He was seeking a wife, trusting to his face and physique to win him favour. He had said to himself:

"The devil! I can certainly find what I want among the crowds that come here." And he sought it with the instinct of a shooting dog, the instinct of a Norman, positive that at first sight he could recognize the woman who would make his fortune.

It was one Monday morning, and he was saying to himself:

"Why—why—why!"

The weather was superb, one of those blue and yellow days in July when it seems to be raining down heat. The immense beach was covered with people in elegant toilets and bright colours, and looked like a garden. The fishing smacks with their brown sails, almost motionless on the blue water in which they were reflected, seemed to be sleeping beneath the morning sun, some quite close to the wooden wharf, others farther off, and some far in the distance, as if overcome by the indolence of a summer day, and too indifferent to go out to sea or even to come into the harbour. And yonder, in a mist, one could perceive the coast of Havre with two white elevations at its highest point, the light-houses of St. Adresse.

"Why—why—why!" he had said, on meeting her for the third time, and feeling that her glance was directed on him, the glance of a mature woman of the world, who sought an acquaintance.

He had noticed her on the previous days, for she also seemed to be looking for some one. She was an Englishwoman, quite tall and rather thin, the bold Englishwoman whom travel and circumstances have rendered mannish. However, she was not bad-looking, walked with a short, decisive step, dressed plainly and neatly, but her headgear was peculiar, as their headgear always is. She had rather handsome eyes, high cheekbones, rather too red, and long teeth, which she always displayed.

When he reached the dock he turned round and walked back again to see if he would meet her once more. He did so, and she looked at him as much as to say:

"Here I am."

But how could she speak to him?

He walked back again for the fifth time, and as they approached face to face she let fall her umbrella. He darted forward, picked it up, and handed it to her, saying:

"Allow me, Madame——"

"*Aôh,* you are very kind," she replied, in poor French. And they looked at one another. They knew not what to say. She was blushing. Suddenly, gathering courage, he said:

"What beautiful weather this is!"

"*Aôh,* delicious!" she murmured.

And they stood there facing each other, embarrassed, but not thinking, either of them, of moving away. It was she who had the courage to ask:

"Are you going to be here long?"

"Oh, yes; as long as I wish," he replied. Then, abruptly, he said:

"Would you like to walk to the pier? It is so pretty on a day like this."

"I should like it," she answered simply.

And they walked along side by side, she with her short, decisive step, and he with his swinging gait, like a strutting turkey.

Three months later the prominent merchants of Caen received, one morning, a large white wedding announcement:

"Monsieur and Madame Prosper Bombard have the honour to inform you of the marriage of their son, Simon Bombard, to Madame Kate Robinson, widow."

And on the other side:

"Madame Kate Robinson, widow, has the honour to inform you of her marriage to Monsieur Simon Bombard."

They settled in Paris. The bride's fortune was fifteen thousand francs a year, free from incumbrance. Simon wanted four hundred francs a month for his personal expenses. He had to show no difficulty in proving it and in obtaining his wish.

All went smoothly at first. Madame Bombard was certainly not young, and had lost much of her freshness; but she had a way of exacting things which made it impossible to refuse her. She would say, with her English accent:

"Oh, Simon, now we must go to bed," and Simon would start toward the bed like a dog who is ordered "To your kennel." And she knew how to get her way on every occasion.

She never got angry, never made scenes, never screamed; she never looked cross or hurt, or even sulky. She simply knew how to say a thing, that was all. And she always spoke to the point, in a tone that admitted of no reply.

More than once Simon was about to demur; but he always ended by yielding to the decisive and imperious wishes of this singular woman. However, as his married life seemer rather monotonous, and as he had enough money to amuse himself with, he lost no opportunity of doing so, but had to be very cautious.

Madame Bombard perceived his infidelity, without his surmising in what manner, and she announced, one evening, that she had hired a house in Mantes, where they would reside in future.

His existence became less bearable. He tried to amuse himself in a variety of ways, but they were not as satisfactory as making conquests of women. He went fishing, knew how to distinguish between the places frequented by gudgeon, by carp, or by roach; the favourite haunts of bream, and the various baits that tempted the different fish. But as he watched his float bobbling in the water his mind was on other things.

He became friendly with the head of the office of the sub-prefecture and with the captain of gendarmes, and they played whist in the evening at the Café de Commerce, but his mind's eye saw the queen of clubs or the queen of diamonds, while his mind became muddled at the thought of these figures with heads but no nether extremities.

Then he thought of a scheme, the veritable scheme of a cunning Norman. He got his wife to hire a maid that he chose, not a pretty, dressy coquette, but a strong, red-faced girl who would not awaken suspicion and whom he had prepared to carry out his plans. She was recommended to them privately by the director of customs, a complaisant friend who was in the plot and vouchsafed for her in every particular. Madame Bombard, suspecting nothing, accepted the treasure that was sent to her.

Simon was happy, but cautiously happy, with some fear, and with incredible difficulties to con-

tend with. He could not escape his wife's anxious watchfulness except for a few moments now and then, and was always uneasy. He sought some ruse, some stratagem, and finally discovered one that was perfectly successful.

Madame Bombard, who had nothing to occupy her, retired early, and Bombard, who played whist at the Café de Commerce, always came home precisely at half-past nine. He had arranged for Victorine to wait for him in the dark in the hallway of the house, on the steps of the vestibule. When, at the end of a few minutes, the girl retired to her attic with a gold piece in her hand, Bombard laughed in triumph, repeating aloud like the barber of King Midas as he was fishing for bleak-fish among the reeds in the river:

"Fooled this time, missus."

And the pleasure of fooling Madame Bombard was worth to him all that was lacking in his matrimonial arrangements.

Now, one evening Victorine was waiting for him as usual on the steps, but she seemed more lively, more animated than usual, and they remained together about ten minutes in the hall. When he entered the bedroom Madame Bombard was not there. A cold chill ran down his back, and he sank into a chair, tortured with anxiety.

Just then she appeared, a candlestick in her hand.

"Did you go out?" he said tremblingly.

"I went to the kitchen to get a glass of water," she replied calmly.

He endeavoured to allay whatever suspicions she

might have, but she seemed quiet, happy, and trusting, and he was reassured.

The following morning when they went into the dining-room to breakfast Victorine was putting the cutlets on the table. When she was moving away from the table Madame Bombard held out a gold piece to her with the tips of her fingers, and said in her calm, serious tone of voice:

"Here, my girl, here is twenty francs that I deprived you of last night. I am returning it to you."

And the astonished maid took the gold piece, which she gazed at in stupid amazement, while Bombard, terrified, stared at his wife with round, wide-open eyes.

HIS CONFESSION

ALL Véziers-le-Réthel had followed the funeral procession of Monsieur Badon-Leremincé, and the last words of the funeral oration, pronounced by the delegate of the district, remained in the minds of all: "He was an honest man, at least!"

An honest man he had been in all the known acts of his life, in his words, in his example, his attitude, his behaviour, his enterprises, in the cut of his beard and the shape of his hats. He had never said a word that did not hold an example, never given an alms without adding a word of advice, never extended his hand without appearing to bestow a benediction.

He left two children: a boy and a girl. His son was Counsellor General, and his daughter, having married a lawyer, Monsieur Poirel de la Voulte, was at the top of the tree in Véziers.

They were inconsolable at the death of their father, for they loved him sincerely.

As soon as the ceremony was over they returned to the house of mourning, and, shutting themselves in the room, the son, daughter, and son-in-law, they opened the will, the seals of which were to be

broken by them alone, and only after the coffin had been placed in the ground. This wish was expressed by a notice on the envelope.

It was Monsieur Poirel de la Voulte who tore open the envelope, in his character of a lawyer used to such operations, and, having adjusted his glasses, he read, in his colourless voice made for reading the details of contracts:

"My children, my dear children, I could not sleep the eternal sleep in peace if I did not make to you from the tomb a confession, the confession of a crime remorse for which has ruined my life. Yes, I committed a crime, a frightful, abominable crime.

"I was then twenty-six, and I had just been called to the bar in Paris, and was living the life of young men from the provinces who are stranded in this town without acquaintances, relatives, or friends.

"I took a sweetheart. There are beings who cannot live alone. I was one of those. Solitude filled me with horrible anguish, the solitude of my room, beside my fire in the evening. I feel then as if I were alone on the earth, frightfully alone, but surrounded by vague dangers, unknown and terrible things; and the partition that separates me from my neighbour, my neighbour whom I do not know, keeps me at as great a distance from him as the stars which I see through my window. A sort of fever pervades me, a fever of impatience and of fear, and the silence of the walls terrifies me. The silence of a room where one lives alone is so intense and so melancholy! It is not only a silence of the

mind; when a piece of furniture cracks a shudder goes right through you, for you expect no noise in this melancholy abode.

"How many times, enervated, timid from this motionless silence, I have begun to talk, to repeat words without rhyme or reason, just to make some sound. My voice at those times appears so strange that I am afraid of that, also. Is there anything more dreadful than talking to one's self in an empty house? One's voice sounds like that of another, an unknown voice talking aimlessly, to no one, in the empty air, with no ear to listen to it, for one knows before they escape into the solitude of the room just what words are going to be uttered. And when they resound lugubriously in the silence, they seem no more than an echo, the peculiar echo of words whispered by one's thought.

"My sweetheart was a young girl like all those young girls who live in Paris on wages that are insufficient to keep them. She was gentle, good, simple. Her parents lived at Poissy. She would go and spend several days with them from time to time.

"For a year I lived quietly with her, fully decided to leave her when I should find some one whom I liked well enough to marry. I would make a little provision for this one, for it is an understood thing in our social set that a woman's love should be paid for, in money if she is poor, in presents if she is rich.

"But one day she told me she was *enceinte*. I was thunderstruck, and saw in a second that my

life would be ruined. I saw the fetter that I should wear until my death, everywhere, in my future family life, in my old age, forever; the fetter of a woman bound to my life through a child; the fetter of the child whom I must bring up, watch over, protect, while keeping myself unknown to him, and keeping him hidden from the world. I was greatly disturbed at this news, and a confused longing, a criminal desire, surged through my mind. I did not formulate it, but I felt it in my heart ready to come to the surface, as if some one hidden behind a portière should await the signal to come out. If some accident might only happen! There are so many of these little beings who die before they are born!

"Oh, I did not wish my sweetheart to die! The poor girl, I loved her very much. But I wished, possibly, that the child might die before I saw it.

"He was born. I set up housekeeping in my room, an imitation home, with a child, horrible. He looked like all children. I did not care for him. Fathers, you see, do not show affection until later. They have not the instinctive and passionate tenderness of mothers; their affection has to be awakened gradually, their mind to become attached by bonds which are formed each day between beings who live in each other's society.

"A year passed. I now avoided my home, that was too small, and where washing, baby clothes, stockings the size of gloves were lying round, a thousand articles of all descriptions, on the furniture, on the arm of an easy-chair, everywhere. I

would go out chiefly that I might not hear it cry, hear him; for he cried on the slightest pretext, when he was changed, when he was bathed, when he was touched, when he was put to bed, when he was taken up in the morning, incessantly.

"I had made a few acquaintances and I met at a reception the one who was to be your mother. I fell in love with her and became anxious to marry her. I courted her, I asked her parents' consent to our marriage, and it was granted.

"And I found myself in this dilemma: I must either marry this young girl whom I adored, having a child already, or else tell the truth and renounce her and happiness and my future, everything; for her parents, who were people of rigid principles, would not give her to me if they knew.

"I passed a month of horrible anguish, of moral torture; a month haunted by a thousand frightful thoughts, and I felt developing in me a hatred toward my son, toward this little morsel of living, screaming flesh, who blocked my path, interrupted my life, condemned me to an existence without hope, without all those vague expectations that make the charm of youth.

"But just then my companion's mother became ill, and I was left alone with the child.

"It was in December and the weather was terribly cold. What a night! My companion had just left. I had dined alone in my little dining-room, and I went gently into the room where the little one was asleep.

"I sat down in an armchair before the fire. The

wind was blowing, making the windows rattle, a dry, frosty wind, and I saw through the window the stars shining with that piercing brightness that they have on nights of frost.

"Then the idea that had obsessed me for a month rose again to the surface. As soon as I was quiet it came to me and harassed me. It ate into my mind like a fixed idea, just as cancers must eat into the flesh. It was there, in my head, in my heart, in my whole body, it seemed to me, and it swallowed me up as a wild beast might have done. I endeavoured to drive it away, to repulse it, to open my mind to other thoughts, as one opens a window to the fresh morning air to drive out the vitiated night air; but I could not drive it from my brain, not even for a second. I do not know how to express this torture. It nibbled at my soul, and I felt a frightful pain, a real physical and moral pain, at each bite it gave.

"My life was over! How could I get out of the situation? How could I draw back, and how could I confess?

"And I loved the one who was to become your mother with a mad passion that this insurmountable obstacle only aggravated.

"A terrible rage was taking possession of me, choking me, a rage that verged on madness—on madness! Surely I was crazy that evening!

"The child was sleeping. I got up and looked at it asleep. It was he, this abortion, this spawn, this nothing, that condemned me to irremediable unhappiness.

"He was asleep, his mouth open, wrapped in his bedclothes, in a crib beside my bed, where I—I could not sleep.

"How did I ever do what I did? How do I know? What force urged me on? What malevolent power took possession of me? Oh, the temptation to crime came to me without any forewarning. All I recall is that my heart beat tumultuously. It beat so hard that I could hear it as one hears the strokes of a hammer behind a partition. That is all I can recall—the beating of my heart! In my head there was a strange confusion, a tumult, a senseless disorder, a lack of presence of mind. It was one of those hours of bewilderment and hallucination when a man is neither conscious of his action nor can guide his will.

"I gently raised the coverings that concealed the body of the child; I turned them down to the foot of the crib, and he lay there uncovered and naked.

"He did not wake. Then I went toward the window, softly, quite softly, and I opened it.

"A breath of icy air glided in like an assassin. It was so cold that I drew aside, and the two candles flickered. I remained standing near the window, not daring to turn round, as if for fear of seeing what was going on behind me, and feeling the icy air passing continuously across my forehead, my cheeks, my hands, the deadly air which kept streaming in. I stood there a long time.

"I was not thinking. I was not reflecting. All at once a little cough made me shudder frightfully from head to foot, a shudder that I feel still to the

roots of my hair. And with a frantic movement I abruptly closed both sides of the window, and, turning round, ran over to the crib.

"He was still asleep, his mouth open, quite naked. I touched his legs; they were icy cold, and I covered them up.

"My heart was suddenly touched, grieved, filled with pity, tenderness, love for this poor innocent being that I had wished to kill. I kissed his fine soft hair long and tenderly; then I went and sat down before the fire.

"I reflected, with amazement, with horror, on what I had done, asking myself whence come those tempests of the soul in which a man loses all perspective of things, all command over himself, and acts as in a condition of mad intoxication, not knowing what he is doing, not knowing whither he is going—like a vessel in a hurricane.

"The child coughed again, and it gave my heart a wrench. Supposing he should die! Oh, God! Oh, God! What would become of me?

"I rose from my chair to go and look at him, and with a candle in my hand I leaned over him. Seeing him breathing quietly, I felt reassured, when he coughed a third time. It gave me such a shock that I started backward, just as one does at sight of something horrible, and let my candle fall.

"As I stood erect, after picking it up, I noticed that my temples were bathed in perspiration, that hot and cold sweat, the result of anguish of soul. And I remained until daylight bending over my son, becoming calm when he remained quiet for

some time, and filled with atrocious pain when a weak cough came from his mouth.

"He awoke with his eyes red, his throat choked up, and with an air of suffering.

"When the woman came in to do my room I sent her at once for a doctor. He came at the end of an hour and said, after examining the child:

"'Did he not catch cold?'

"I began to tremble like an old person with the palsy, and I faltered:

"'*Non,* I do not think so.'

"And then I said:

"'What is the matter? Is it serious?'

"'I do not know yet,' he replied. 'I will come again this evening.'

"He came that evening. My son had remained almost all day in a condition of drowsiness, coughing from time to time. During the night inflammation of the lungs set in.

"That lasted ten days. I cannot express what I suffered in those interminable hours that divide morning from night, night from morning.

"He died. . . .

"And since—since that moment I have not passed one hour, not a single hour, without the frightful, burning recollection, a gnawing recollection, a memory that seems to wrench one's soul, awaking in me like a savage beast imprisoned in the depths of my soul.

"Oh! if I could have gone mad!"

* * * * * * *

Monsieur Poirel de la Voulte raised his spectacles with a motion that was peculiar to him whenever he finished reading a contract, and the three heirs of the defunct looked at one another without speaking, pale and motionless.

At the end of a minute the lawyer resumed:

"That must be destroyed."

The other two bent their heads in sign of assent. He lighted a candle, carefully separated the pages containing the damaging confession from those relating to the disposition of money, then he held them over the candle and threw them into the fireplace.

And they watched the white sheets as they burned till they were presently reduced to little crumbling black heaps. And as some words were still visible in white tracing, the daughter, with little strokes of the toe of her shoe, crushed the burning paper, mixing it with the old ashes in the fireplace.

Then they all three stood there watching it for some time, as though they feared that the burned-up secret might escape from the fireplace.

MADEMOISELLE COCOTTE

WE were just leaving the asylum when I saw a tall, thin man in a corner of the court who was obstinately pretending to call an imaginary dog. He was crying in a soft, tender voice: "Cocotte! Come here, Cocotte, my beauty!" and slapping his thigh as one does when calling an animal. I asked the physician: "Who is that man?" He answered: "Oh! he is not at all interesting . . . he is a coachman named François, who became insane after drowning his dog."

I insisted: "Tell me his story. The most simple and humble things are sometimes those which touch our hearts most deeply."

Here is this man's adventure, which was obtained from a friend of his, a groom:

There was a family of rich *bourgeois* who lived in a suburb of Paris. They had a villa in the middle of a park, at the edge of the Seine. Their coachman was this François, a country fellow, a little heavy, kind-hearted, simple, and easy to deceive.

One evening, as he was returning home, a dog began to follow him. At first he paid no attention to it, but the creature's obstinacy at last made

him turn around. He looked to see if he knew this dog. No, he had never seen it. It was a nursing female, and frightfully thin. She was trotting behind him with a mournful and famished look, her tail between her legs, her ears flattened against her head, and stopping and starting whenever he did.

He tried to chase this skeleton away, and cried: "Run along! Get out! kss! kss!" She retreated a few steps, then sat down and waited! And when the coachman started to walk again she followed along behind him.

He pretended to pick up some stone. The animal ran a little farther away, but came back again as soon as the man's back was turned.

Then the coachman François took pity on the beast and called her. The dog approached timidly. The man patted her protruding ribs, moved by the beast's misery, and he cried: "Come! come here!" Immediately she began to wag her tail, and, feeling herself taken in, adopted, she began to run along ahead of her new master.

He made her a bed on the straw in the stable, then he ran to the kitchen for some bread. When she had eaten all she could she curled up and went to sleep.

When the masters heard of this the next day they allowed the coachman to keep the animal. It was a good beast, caressing and faithful, intelligent and gentle.

But soon they saw that she had a terrible fault. She was in love from one year's end to another. In a very short while she had made the acquaintance

of all the dogs in the neighbourhood, who immediately began to roam around her day and night. She distributed her favours to them with absolute impartiality, seeming to be on the best of terms with them all, dragging behind her a regular pack, composed of the most varied types of the barking race, some as large as the fist, others the size of donkeys. She trotted them along all the roads on endless journeys, and when she would stop to rest on the grass they would make a circle about her and watch her with their tongues hanging out.

The people of the neighbourhood looked upon her as a phenomenon; they had never seen anything like it. The veterinary was at a loss. At night, when she would return to the stable, the crowd of dogs would besiege the estate. They would slip in through every break in the hedge, trample down the plots, pull up the flowers, dig holes in the ground, and generally exasperate the gardener, and they would howl all night, gathered around the building where their friend lay; and nothing could persuade them to leave.

During the daytime they would even go into the house. It was an invasion, a play, a disaster. At all moments the masters would find on the stairs and even in their rooms little yellow terriers, pointers, bulldogs, mangy curs with neither home nor hearth, enormous Newfoundlands which frightened the children.

Then, all over the countryside, people began to see unknown dogs who had come from they knew

not where, living no one knew how, and who had then disappeared again.

Nevertheless, François adored Cocotte, and he kept repeating: "That beast is human. She only lacks speech."

He had a magnificent red leather collar made for her which bore these words engraved on a copper plate: "Mademoiselle Cocotte, belonging to the coachman François."

She had become enormous. She was now as fat as she had been thin. She had grown stout all of a sudden, and now walked with difficulty, like human beings who are too obese, and she would pant as soon as she would start to run.

She showed an extraordinary fertility; four times a year she would give birth to a batch of little animals belonging to every variety of the canine race. François would pick out one which he would leave her, and then he would unmercifully throw the others into the river. But soon the cook joined her complaints to those of the gardener. She would find dogs under the stove, in the ice box, in the coal bin, and they would steal everything they came across.

The master impatiently ordered François to get rid of Cocotte. In despair, the man tried to give her away. Nobody wanted her. Then he decided to lose her, and he gave her to a teamster, who was to drop her on the other side of Paris, near Joinville-le-Pont.

Cocotte returned the same day. Some decision had to be taken. Five francs was given to a train

conductor to take her to Havre. He was to drop her there.

Three days later she returned to the stable, scratched up, harassed, and tired out.

The master took pity on her and let her stay. But the other dogs soon returned, more numerous than ever. And one evening, when a big dinner party was on, a stuffed turkey was carried away by a dog right under the cook's nose; and she did not dare to stop him.

This time the master completely lost his temper, and angrily told François: "If you don't throw this beast into the water before to-morrow morning, I'll put you out, do you hear?"

The man was dumfounded, and he returned to his room to pack his trunk, preferring to leave the place. Then he bethought himself that he could find no other place as long as he dragged this animal behind him; he thought of the good position, where he was well paid and well fed, and he decided that a dog was really not worth all that; at last he took the decision to rid himself of Cocotte at daybreak.

He slept badly. He rose at dawn, seized a strong rope, and went to get the dog. She stood up slowly, shook herself, stretched, and came to her master.

Then his courage forsook him, and he began to kiss her tenderly, petting her and calling her tender names.

But a neighbouring clock struck six. He could no longer hesitate. He opened the door, calling: "Come!" The beast wagged her tail, understanding that she was to be taken out.

They reached the beach, and he chose a place where the water seemed deep. Then he knotted the rope around the leather collar and tied a heavy stone to the other end. He seized Cocotte in his arms and kissed her madly, as though he were taking leave of some human being. He held her to his breast, rocked her, and called her "my dear little Cocotte, my sweet little Cocotte," and she grunted with pleasure.

Ten times he tried to throw her into the water, and each time he lost courage.

But suddenly he took his decision, and he threw her as far from him as he could. At first she tried to swim, as she did when he gave her a bath, but her head, dragged down by the stone, kept going under; and she looked at her master with wild, human glances as she struggled like a drowning person. Then the front part of her body sank while her hind legs waved wildly out of the water; finally those also disappeared.

Then, for five minutes, bubbles rose to the surface as though the river were boiling; and François, haggard, his heart beating, thought that he saw Cocotte struggling in the mud; and, with the simplicity of a peasant, he kept saying to himself: "What's the poor beast think of me now?"

He almost lost his mind; he was sick for a month, and every night he dreamed of his dog; he could feel her licking his hands and hear her barking. It was necessary to call in a physician. At last he recovered, and toward the end of June his masters took him to their estate at Biessard, near Rouen.

There again he was near the Seine. He began to take baths. Each morning he would go down with the groom, and they would swim across the river.

One day, as they were disporting themselves in the water, François suddenly cried to his companion: "Look what's coming! I'm going to give you a chop!"

It was an enormous, swollen corpse that was floating down with its feet sticking straight up in the air.

François swam up to it, still joking: "Whew! it's not fresh. What a catch, old man! It isn't thin, either!" He kept swimming around at a distance from the stupefying beast. Then suddenly he was silent and looked at it strangely; this time he came near enough to touch it. He looked fixedly at the collar, then he stretched out his arm, seized the neck, twisted the corpse around, and drew it up close to him and read on the copper, which had turned green and which still stuck to the discoloured leather: "Mademoiselle Cocotte, belonging to the coachman François."

The dead dog had come more than a hundred miles to find its master!

He let out a frightful shriek, and began to swim for the beach with all his might, still howling; and as soon as he touched land he ran away wildly, stark naked, through the country. He was insane!

RUSTIC TRIBUNALS

THE courtroom of Gorgeville is full of peasants who are standing along the walls, motionless, awaiting the opening.

There are tall ones and short ones, fat, red-faced ones and dried-up, thin ones. They have placed their baskets on the ground, and they stand there quiet and silent, engrossed by their own business. They have brought with them the odour of the stable and of perspiration, of sour milk and the dungheap. Flies are buzzing on the white ceiling. Through the open door can be heard the crowing of cocks.

On a sort of platform stands a long table covered by green cloth. A wrinkled old man is sitting at the left end of it, writing. Sitting to the extreme right is a gendarme. On the bare wall a great wooden Christ, twisted into a painful position, seems still to offer his eternal suffering for these brutes with the odours of beasts.

The Justice of the Peace finally enters. He is fat, high-coloured, and his official gown flaps behind him as he hurries on. He sits down and looks at the audience with a look of supreme disdain.

He is one of these educated provincials, one of

those who translate Horace, enjoy Voltaire's verse, and know *Vert-Vert* by heart, as well as the *risqué* poems of Parny.

He calls: "Well, Monsieur Potel, call the cases." Then he smiles and murmurs: "*Quidquid tentabam dicere versus erat.*"

The clerk of the court raises his bald head and mutters unintelligibly: "Madame Victoire Bascule *versus* Isidore Paturon."

An enormous countrywoman comes forward, one of the ladies of the county seat, with a beribboned hat, a watch chain stretched across her bosom, rings on her fingers, and earrings shining like lighted candles.

The Justice of the Peace bows to her with a look of recognition, in which there is a glint of jest, and he says: "Madame Bascule, please make clear your troubles."

The opposing party stands on the other side. It is represented by three persons. In the middle stands a young peasant of twenty-five, as plump as an apple and as red as a poppy. To his right is his wife, very young, thin, short, like a bantam chicken, with a narrow, flat head on which is fastened a pink bonnet. She has a round, surprised, and angry eye with which she glances sideways, after the fashion of poultry. To the left of the boy stands his father, a bent old man, whose twisted body disappears in his starched blouse as though it were under a bell.

Madame Bascule explains: "Your Honour, fifteen years ago I took this boy in. I have brought

him up and loved him as a mother, I have done everything for him, I have made a man of him. He had promised, he had sworn not to leave me. He even signed an agreement, for which I gave him my little estate of Bec-de-Mortin, which is worth about six thousand. Now this little snip, this minx, this hussy——"

The Justice: Moderate your language, Madame Bascule.

Madame Bascule: This little . . . this little . . . well, I know what she is . . . turned his head, did I don't know what to him . . . and this big fool is going to marry her, and bring to her my property, my estate of Bec-de-Mortin. . . . Oh! no, no, indeed! . . . I have a paper, here it is . . . then let him give me back my property. We had a deed made out before the notary for the property, and a private paper for friendship. One is worth the other. Each one is secure that way, isn't he?

(*She holds out to the Justice a large stamped paper.*)

Isidore Paturon: It isn't true.

The Justice: Keep still. You'll talk when your turn comes.

He reads: "I, the undersigned, Isidore Paturon, promise by this paper to my benefactress, Madame Bascule, never to leave her during my lifetime, and to serve her with devotion. Gorgeville, August 5, 1883."

The Justice: There is a cross as a signature. Can't you write?

Isidore: No.

The Justice: Did you make that cross?

Isidore: No.

The Justice: Well, then, who did it?

Isidore: She did it.

The Justice: Are you prepared to swear that you never made this cross?

Isidore (*earnestly*): I swear on the head of my father, of my mother, of my grandfather, of my grandmother, and of God who hears me, I swear it wasn't I. (*He raises his hand and spits to strengthen his oath.*)

The Justice (*laughing*): What were your relations with Madame Bascule, here present?

Isidore: She used me for her pleasure. (*Laughter in the audience.*)

The Justice: You mean to say that your relations were not as pure as she claims.

Father Paturon (*interrupting*): He wasn't fifteen, not fifteen, your Honour, when she despatched him. . . .

The Justice: You mean debauched, don't you?

The Father: I don't know. He wasn't fifteen. For four years she had been feeding him like a stuffed chicken, stuffing enough food into him to make him burst, saving your respect. And when the time had come when he seemed ready, she depraved him. . . .

The Justice: Depraved? And you allowed it?

The Father: It didn't make any difference whether it was she or another; it had to happen.

The Justice: Then of what are you complaining?

The Father: Nothing! I'm not complaining; only he's had enough, and he can't get away. I ask for protection from the law.

Madame Bascule: Your Honour, these people have been overwhelming you with lies. I made a man of him.

The Justice: I should say you had!

Madame Bascule: Now he wants to leave me; he wants to rob me. . . .

Isidore: It's not true, Judge. Five years ago I wanted to leave her because she got too fat, and I didn't like it. I told her I was going to leave her. Then she cries like a sponge, and said she'd give me Bec-de-Mortin to spend four or five more years with her. I said: "Yes, certainly!" Wouldn't you? I stayed five years, day fer day, hour fer hour. I was quits. Wasn't it worth it? (*Isidore's wife, who had been silent up to then, cries out in a piercing voice*):

"Look at her, look at her, Judge! Wasn't it worth it?"

The father nods his head in a convinced manner, and repeats: "It certainly was worth it."

Madame Bascule sinks onto the bench behind her, and begins to cry.

The Justice (*paternally*): My dear lady, I'm afraid that I can do nothing for you. You gave him your estate of Bec-de-Mortin in a perfectly regular manner. It certainly belongs to him. He had the unquestionable right to do whatever he wished with it, and to bring it to his wife as a dowry. It is not for me to enter into questions of

. . . of . . . of delicacy. I must look at the thing from a legal point of view. I can do nothing.

Father Paturon (*proudly*): May I go home?

The Justice: Certainly.

(*They go away under the sympathetic looks of the peasants, like people whose case is won. Madame Bascule sits sobbing on the bench.*)

The Justice (*smiling*): Calm yourself, dear lady, calm yourself. And if I have some advice to give you, it is to look for another—pupil.

Madame Bascule (*through her tears*): I can't find another.

The Justice: I am sorry that I am unable to recommend one to you.

(*She throws a despairing look toward the Christ on the cross, then she rises and leaves slowly, still weeping and hiding her face in her handkerchief.*)

The Justice (*turning toward the clerk of the court, and in a bantering voice*): Calypso could not be comforted after the departure of Ulysses. . . . (*In a serious voice*): Call the following cases.

The Clerk of the Court (*mumbling*): Célestin Polyte Lecacheur *versus* Prosper Magloire Dieulafait.

A STROLL

WHEN Old Man Leras, bookkeeper for Messieurs Labuze and Company, left the store, he stood for a minute bewildered at the glory of the setting sun. He had worked all day in the yellow light of a small jet of gas, far in the back of the store, on a narrow court, as deep as a well. The little room where he had been spending his days for forty years was so dark that even in the middle of summer one could only go without the gaslight from eleven until three.

It was always damp and cold, and from this hole onto which his window opened came the musty odour of a sewer.

For forty years Monsieur Leras had been arriving every morning in this prison at eight o'clock, and he would remain there until seven at night, bending over his books, writing with the application of a good clerk.

He was now making three thousand francs a year, having started at fifteen hundred. He had remained a bachelor, as his means had not allowed him the luxury of a wife, and as he had never enjoyed anything, he desired nothing. From time to time however, tired of his continuous and monot-

onous work, he formed a platonic wish: "Gad! If I only had an income of fifteen thousand francs, I would take life easy."

He had never taken life easy, as he had never had anything but his monthly salary. His life had been uneventful, without emotions, without hopes. The faculty of dreaming with which every one is blessed had never developed in the mediocrity of his ambitions.

When he was twenty-one he entered the employ of Messieurs Labuze and Company. And he had never left them.

In 1856 he had lost his father, and then his mother in 1859. Since then the only incident in his life was when he moved, in 1868, because his landlord had tried to raise his rent.

Every day his alarm clock made him jump out of bed at exactly six, with a frightful noise of rattling chains.

Twice, however, this piece of mechanism had been out of order. Once in 1866 and again in 1874; he had never been able to find out the reason why. He would dress, make his bed, sweep his room, dust his chair and the top of his bureau. All this took him an hour and a half.

Then he would go out, buy a roll at the Lahure Bakery, in which he had seen eleven different owners without the name ever changing, and he would eat this roll on the way to the office.

His entire existence had been spent in the narrow, dark office, which was still decorated with the same wall paper. He had entered there as a young

man, as assistant to Monsieur Brument, and with the desire to replace him.

He had taken his place and wished for nothing more.

The whole harvest of memories which other men reap in their span of years, the unexpected events, sweet or tragic loves, adventurous journeys, all the occurrences of a free existence, all these things had remained unknown to him.

Days, weeks, months, seasons, years, all were alike to him. He got up every day at the same hour, started out, arrived at the office, ate luncheon, went away, had dinner, and went to bed without ever interrupting the regular monotony of similar actions, deeds, and thoughts.

Formerly he used to look at his blond moustache and wavy hair in the little round mirror left by his predecessor. Now, every evening before leaving, he would look at his white moustache and bald head in the same mirror. Forty years had rolled by, long and rapid, dreary as a day of sadness and as similar as the hours of a nightmare! Forty years of which nothing remained, not even a memory, not even a misfortune, since the death of his parents. Nothing.

That day Monsieur Leras stood by the door, dazzled at the brilliancy of the setting sun; and instead of returning home he decided to take a little stroll before dinner, a thing which happened to him four or five times a year.

He reached the boulevards, where people were streaming along under the green trees. It was a

spring evening, one of those first warm and pleasant evenings which fill the heart with the joy of life.

Monsieur Leras went along with his mincing old man's step; he was going along with joy in his heart, at peace with the world. He reached the Champs-Elysées, and he continued to walk, enlivened at the sight of the young people trotting along.

The whole sky was aflame; the Arc de Triomphe stood out against the brilliant background of the horizon, like a giant surrounded by fire. As he approached the gigantic monument, the old bookkeeper noticed that he was hungry, and he went into a wine dealer's for dinner.

The meal was served in front of the store, on the sidewalk; it consisted of some mutton, salad, and asparagus; it was the best dinner that Monsieur Leras had had in a long time. He washed down his cheese with a small bottle of burgundy, had his after-dinner cup of coffee, a thing which he rarely took, and finally a little pony of brandy.

When he had paid he felt quite youthful, even a little moved. And he said to himself: "What a fine evening! I will continue my stroll as far as the entrance to the Bois de Boulogne. It will do me good."

He set out. An old tune which one of his neighbours used to sing kept returning to his mind. He kept on humming it over and over again. A hot, still night had fallen over Paris. Monsieur Leras was following along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne and watching the cabs drive by. They kept

coming with their shining lights, one behind the other, giving him a glimpse of the couples inside, the women in their light dresses and the men dressed in black.

It was one long procession of lovers, riding under the warm, starlit sky. They kept on coming in rapid succession. They passed by in the carriages, pressed against each other, lost in their dreams, in the emotion of desire, in the anticipation of the approaching embrace. The warm shadows seemed to be full of floating kisses. A sensation of tenderness filled the air. All these embracing couples, all these people intoxicated with the same idea, with the same thought, made the atmosphere around them feverish.

At last Monsieur Leras grew a little tired of walking, and he sat down on a bench to watch these carriages pass by with their burdens of love. Almost immediately a woman walked up to him and sat down beside him. "Good evening, papa," she said.

He did not answer, and she continued: "Let me love you, dearie; you'll see how nice I can be."

He answered: "Madame, you are mistaken."

She slipped her arm through his, saying: "Come along, now; don't be foolish, listen. . . ."

He arose and walked away, with sadness in his heart. A few yards away another woman walked up to him and asked: "Won't you sit down beside me?"

He said: "What makes you do that?"

She stood before him and in an altered, hoarse,

angry voice exclaimed: "Well, it isn't for the fun of it, anyhow!"

He insisted in a gentle voice: "Then what makes you?"

She grumbled: "I've got to live! Foolish question!" And she walked away, humming.

Monsieur Leras stood there bewildered. Other women were passing near him, speaking to him and calling to him. He felt as though he were enveloped in darkness, by something disagreeable.

He sat down again on a bench; the carriages were still rolling by. He thought: "I should have done better not to come here; I feel all upset."

He began to think of all this venal or passionate love, of all these kisses, sold or given, which were passing by in front of him. Love! He scarcely knew it. In his lifetime he had only known two or three women, his means forcing him to live a quiet life, and he looked back at the life which he had led, so different from everybody else, so dreary, so mournful, so empty.

Some people are really unfortunate. And suddenly, as though a veil had been torn from his eyes, he perceived the infinite misery, the monotony of his existence; the past, present, and future misery; his last day similar to his first one, with nothing before him, behind him or about him, nothing in his heart or any place.

The stream of carriages was still going by. In the rapid passage of the open cab he still saw the two silent and embracing creatures. It seemed to him that the whole of humanity was flowing on be-

fore him, intoxicated with joy, pleasure, and happiness. He alone was looking on. To-morrow he would again be alone, always alone, more so than any one else. He stood up, took a few steps, and suddenly he felt as tired as though he had taken a long journey on foot, and he sat down on the next bench.

What was he waiting for? What was he hoping for? Nothing. He was thinking of how pleasant it must be in old age to return home and find the little children. It is pleasant to grow old when one is surrounded by those beings who owe their life to you, who love you, who caress you, who tell you charming and foolish little things which warm your heart and console you for everything.

And, thinking of his empty room, clean and sad, where no one but himself ever entered, a feeling of distress filled his soul; and the place seemed to him more mournful even than his little office. Nobody ever came there; no one ever spoke in it. It was dead, silent, without the echo of a human voice. It seems as though the walls retain something of the people who live within them, something of their manner, face and voice. The houses inhabited by happy families are gayer than the dwellings of the unfortunate. His room was as barren of memories as his life. And the thought of returning to this place, all alone, of getting into his bed, of doing over again all the movements and actions of every evening, this thought terrified him. As though to escape farther from this sinister home, and from the time when he would have to return to it, he

arose and walked out on the grass behind the bushes.

About him, above him, everywhere, he heard the continuous, immense, confused rumble, composed of countless and different noises, a vague and great palpitation of life; the breath of Paris, breathing like a giant.

The sun was already shedding a flood of light on the Bois de Boulogne. Several carriages were beginning to drive about, and people were appearing on horseback.

A couple was walking through a deserted alley. Suddenly the young woman raised her eyes and saw something brown in the branches. Surprised and anxious, she raised her hand, exclaiming: "Look! what is that?"

Then she shrieked and fell into the arms of her companion, who was forced to place her on the ground.

The policeman who had been called took down an old man who had hung himself with his suspenders.

Examination showed that he had died on the evening before. The papers found on him showed that he was a bookkeeper with Messieurs Labuze and Company, and that his name was Leras.

The death was attributed to suicide, the cause of which could not be suspected. Perhaps a sudden access of madness!

THE DOOR

"AH!" exclaimed Karl Massouligny, "the question of complaisant husbands is a difficult one. I have seen many kinds, and yet I am unable to give an opinion about any of them. I have often tried to determine whether they are blind, weak, or clairvoyant. I believe that there are some which belong to each of these categories.

"Let us quickly pass over the blind ones. They cannot rightly be called complaisant, since they do not know, but they are good creatures who cannot see farther than their nose. It is a curious and interesting thing to notice the ease with which men and women can be deceived. We are taken in by the slightest trick of those who surround us—of our children, our friends, our servants, our tradespeople. Humanity is credulous, and in order to discover deceit of others, we do not display one-tenth the finesse which we use when we, in turn, wish to deceive some one else.

"The clairvoyant husbands can be divided into three classes. Those who have some interest, pecuniary, ambitious or otherwise, in their wife's having a lover, or lovers. These ask only to safeguard appearances as near as possible, and they are satisfied.

"Next come those who get angry. What a beautiful novel one could write about them!

"Finally the weak ones! Those who are afraid of scandal.

"There are also those who are powerless, or, rather, tired, who escape the conjugal bed from fear of ataxia or apoplexy, who are satisfied to see a friend run these risks.

"But I have met a husband of a rare species, and who guarded against the common accident in a strange and witty manner.

"In Paris I had made the acquaintance of an elegant, fashionable couple. The woman, nervous, tall, slender, courted, was supposed to have had many adventures. She pleased me with her wit, and I believe that I pleased her, also. I courted her, a trial courting to which she answered with evident provocations. Soon we arrived at the edge of tender glances, pressures of the hands, all the little gallantries which precede the great attack.

"Nevertheless, I hesitated. I believe that, as a rule, the majority of society intrigues, however short they may be, are not worth the trouble which they give us and the difficulties which may arise. I therefore mentally compared the advantages and disadvantages which I could expect, and I thought that I noticed that the husband suspected me.

"One evening, at a ball, as I was saying tender things to the young woman in a little parlour leading from the big hall where the dancing was going on, I noticed in a mirror the reflection of some one who was watching us. It was he. Our looks

met, and then I saw him turn his head and walk away.

"I murmured: 'Your husband is spying on us.'

"She seemed dumfounded, and asked: 'My husband?'

"'Yes, he has been watching us for some time.'

"'Nonsense! Are you sure?'

"'Very sure.'

"'How strange! He is usually very pleasant with all my friends.'

"'Perhaps he guessed that I love you!'

"'Nonsense! You were not the first one to pay attention to me. Every woman who is a little in view drags behind her a herd of sighers.'

"'Yes. But I love you deeply.'

"'Admitting that that is true, does a husband ever guess those things?'

"'Then he is not jealous?'

"'No—no!'

"She thought for an instant, and then continued: 'No. I do not think that I ever noticed any jealousy on his part.'

"'Has he never—watched you?'

"'No. As I said, he is always agreeable to my friends.'

"From that day my courting became much more assiduous. The woman did not please me any more than before, but the probable jealousy of her husband tempted me greatly.

"As for her, I judged her coolly and clearly. She had a certain worldly charm, due to a quick, gay, amiable, and superficial mind, but no real, deep

attraction. She was, as I have already said, a little nervous, and quite elegant. How can I explain myself? It was . . . . a decoration, not a home.

"One day, after taking dinner with her, her husband said to me, just as I was leaving: 'My dear friend' (he now called me 'friend'), 'we soon leave for the country. It is a great pleasure for my wife and myself to receive the people whom we like. We would like to have you spend a month with us. It would be very nice of you to do so.'

"I was dumfounded, but I accepted.

"A month later I arrived at their estate of Vert-cresson, in Touraine. They were waiting for me at the station, five miles from the château. There were three of them, she, the husband, and a gentleman unknown to me, the Comte de Morterade, to whom I was introduced. He appeared to be delighted to make my acquaintance, and the strangest ideas passed through my mind while we trotted along the beautiful road between two hedges. I was saying to myself: 'Let's see, what can this mean? Here is a husband who cannot doubt that his wife and I are on more than friendly terms, and yet he invites me to his house, receives me like an old friend, and seems to say: "Go ahead, my friend, the road is clear!"

"'Then I am introduced to a very pleasant gentleman, who seems already to have settled down in the house, and . . . and who is perhaps trying to get out of it, and who seems as pleased at my arrival as the husband himself.

"'Is it some former lover who wishes to retire?

One might think so. But, then, would these two men tacitly have come to one of these infamous little agreements so common in society? And it is proposed to me that I should quietly enter into the association and take up the continuation of it. All hands and arms are held out to me. All doors and hearts are open to me.

"'And what about her? An enigma. She cannot be ignorant of everything. However? . . . however? . . . that's it. I understand nothing.'

"The dinner was very gay and cordial. On leaving the table the husband and his friend began to play cards, while I went out on the porch to look at the moonlight with Madame. She seemed to be greatly moved by nature, and I judged that the moment for my happiness was near. That evening she was really delightful. The country had seemed to make her more tender. Her long, slender waist looked pretty on this stone porch beside a great vase in which grew some flowers. I felt like dragging her out under the trees, throwing myself at her feet, and speaking to her words of love.

"Her husband's voice called: 'Louise?'

"'Yes, my dear.'

"'You are forgetting the tea.'

"'I'll go right for it, my friend.'

"We returned to the house, and she served us with tea. When the two men had finished playing cards, they were visibly tired. I had to go to my room. I did not get to sleep till late, and then I slept badly.

"An excursion was decided upon for the following afternoon, and we went in an open carriage to visit some ruins. She and I were in the back of the vehicle and they were opposite us, riding backward. The conversation was sympathetic and agreeable. I am an orphan, and it seemed to me as though I had just found my family, I felt so at home with them.

"Suddenly, as she had stretched out her foot between her husband's legs, he murmured reproachfully: 'Louise, please don't use up your old shoes yourself. There is no reason for being neater in Paris than in the country.'

"I lowered my eyes. She was indeed wearing worn-out shoes, and I noticed that her stockings were not pulled up tightly.

"She had blushed and hidden her foot under her dress. The friend was looking out in the distance, with an indifferent and unconcerned look.

"The husband offered me a cigar, which I accepted. For a few days it was impossible for me to be alone with her for two minutes; he was with us everywhere. He was delightful to me.

"One morning he came to get me to take a walk before breakfast, and the conversation happened to turn to marriage. I spoke a little about solitude, and about how charming life can be made by a woman. Suddenly he interrupted me, saying: 'My friend, don't talk about things you know nothing about. A woman who has no more reason for loving you will not love you for a long time. All the little coquetries which make them so exquisite when

they do not definitely belong to us cease as soon as they become ours. And then . . . the respectable women . . . that is to say, our wives . . . are . . . are not . . . quite . . . do not understand their profession of wife. Do you understand?'

"He said no more, and I could not guess his thoughts.

"Two days after this conversation he called me to his room quite early in order to show me a collection of engravings. I sat in an easy-chair opposite the big door which separated his apartment from his wife's, and behind this door I heard some one walking and moving, and I was thinking very little of the engravings, although I kept exclaiming: 'Oh, charming! delightful! exquisite!'

"He suddenly said: 'Oh! I have a beautiful specimen in the next room. I'll go get it.'

"He ran to the door quickly, and both sides opened as though for a theatrical effect.

"In a large room, all in disorder, in the midst of skirts, collars, waists lying around on the floor, stood a tall, dried-up creature. The lower part of her body was covered with an old, worn-out silk petticoat, which was hanging limply to her shapeless form, and she was standing in front of a mirror brushing some short, sparse blond hairs. Her arms formed two acute angles, and as she turned around in astonishment I saw under a common cotton chemise a regular cemetery of ribs, which were hidden from the public gaze by well-arranged pads.

"The husband uttered a natural cry and came

back, closing the doors, and said: 'Gracious! how stupid I am! Oh, how thoughtless! My wife will never forgive me for that!'

"I already felt like thanking him. I left three days later, after cordially shaking hands with the two men and kissing the lady's fingers; she bade me a cold good-by."

Karl Massouligny was silent. Some one asked: "But what was the friend?"

"I don't know . . . however . . . however, he looked greatly distressed to see me leaving so soon."

THE NIGHT OF THE WEDDING

FOR a long time Jacques Bourdillère had sworn that he would never marry; but he suddenly changed his mind. It happened suddenly, one summer, at the seashore.

One morning, as he lay stretched out on the sand, watching the women coming out of the water, a little foot had struck him by its neatness and daintiness. He looked up higher and was delighted with the whole person. By the way, he could see nothing but the ankles and the head emerging from a flannel bathrobe carefully held closed. He was supposed to be sensual and a fast liver. It was, therefore, only through the graceful form that he was at first captured; then he was held by the charm of the young girl's sweet mind, so simple and good, as fresh as her cheeks and lips.

He was presented to the family and pleased them; he immediately fell madly in love. When he would see Berthe Lannis in the distance, on the long yellow stretch of sand, he would tingle to the roots of his hair. When he was near her he would become silent, unable to speak or even to think, with a kind of bubbling in his heart, of buzzing in his ears, and of bewilderment in his mind. Was that love?

He did not know or understand, but he had fully decided to have this child for his wife.

Her parents hesitated for a long time, restrained by the young man's bad reputation. It was said that he had an old sweetheart, one of these binding attachments which one always believes to be broken off and yet which always hold.

Besides, for a shorter or longer period, he loved every woman who came within reach of his lips.

Then he settled down and refused, even once, to see the one with whom he had lived for so long. A friend took care of this woman's pension and assured her an income. Jacques paid, but he did not even wish to hear of her, pretending even to ignore her name. She wrote him letters which he never opened. Every week he would recognize the clumsy writing of the abandoned woman, and every week a greater anger surged within him against her, and he would quickly tear the envelope and the paper, without opening it, without reading one single line, knowing in advance the reproaches and complaints which it contained.

As but little faith existed in his constancy, the test was prolonged through the winter, and Berthe's hand was not granted him until the spring. The wedding took place in Paris at the beginning of May.

The young couple had decided not to take the conventional wedding trip; but after a little dance for the younger cousins, which would not be prolonged after eleven o'clock in order that this day of lengthy ceremonies might not be too tiresome, the

young pair were to spend the first night in the parental home and then, on the following morning, to leave for the beach so dear to their hearts where they had known and loved each other.

Night had come, and the dance was going on in the large parlour. The two had retired in a little Japanese boudoir, hung with bright silks and dimly lighted by the soft rays of a large coloured lantern hanging from the ceiling like a gigantic egg. Through the open window the fresh air from outside passed over their faces like a caress, for the night was warm and calm, full of the odour of spring.

They were saying nothing to each other; they were holding each other's hands, and from time to time squeezing them with all their might. She sat there with a dreamy look, feeling a little lost by this great change in her life, but smiling, moved, ready to cry, often, also, ready almost to faint from joy, believing the whole world to be changed by what had just happened to her, nervous she knew not of what, and feeling her whole body and soul filled by an indefinable and delicious lassitude.

He was looking at her obstinately with a fixed smile. He wished to speak, but found nothing to say, and so sat there, putting all his ardour in pressures of the hand. From time to time he would murmur: "Berthe!" And each time she would raise her eyes to him with a look of tenderness; they would look at each other for a second, and then her look, pierced and fascinated by his, would fall.

They found no thoughts to exchange. They had been left alone, but occasionally some of the dancers would cast a rapid glance at them, as though they were the discreet and trusting witnesses of a mystery.

A door opened and a servant entered, holding on a tray a letter which a messenger had just brought. Jacques, trembling, took this paper, overwhelmed by a vague and sudden fear, the mysterious terror of swift misfortune.

He looked for a long time at the envelope, the writing on which he did not know, not daring to open it, not wishing to read it, with a wild desire to put it in his pocket and say to himself: "I'll leave that till to-morrow, when I'm far away!" But on one corner two words stared at him: "*Very urgent,*" filling him with terror. Saying: "Please excuse me, my dear," he tore open the envelope. He read the paper, grew frightfully pale, looked over it again, and, slowly, he seemed to spell it out word for word.

When he raised his head his whole face was upset. He stammered: "My dear, it . . . it's from my best friend, who has had a very great misfortune. He has need of me immediately . . . for a matter of life or death. Will you excuse me if I leave you for half an hour? I'll be right back."

Trembling and dazed, she stammered: "Go ahead, my dear!" not yet having been his wife long enough to dare to question him, to demand to know. He disappeared. She remained alone, listening to the dancing in the neighbouring parlour.

He had seized up the first hat and coat he came to and jumped down the stairs three at a time. As he was emerging into the street he stopped under the gas-jet of the vestibule and re-read the letter. This is what it said:

"SIR: A girl by the name of Ravet, an old sweetheart of yours, it seems, has just given birth to a child whom she claims to be yours. The mother is about to die and is begging for you. I take the liberty to write and ask you if you can grant this last request to a woman who seems to be very unhappy and worthy of pity.

"Yours truly,

"DR. BONNARD."

When he reached the sick-room the woman was already on the point of death. He did not recognize her at first. The doctor and two nurses were taking care of her. And everywhere on the floor were pails full of ice and rags covered with blood. Water flooded the carpet; two candles were burning on a bureau; behind the bed, in a little wicker crib, the child was crying, and each time it would moan the mother, in torture, would try to move, shivering under her ice bandages.

She was wounded to death by his birth. Her life was flowing from her; and, notwithstanding the ice and the care, the merciless hemorrhage continued, hastening her last hour.

She recognized Jacques, and wished to raise her arms. They were so weak that she could not, but down her pallid cheeks coursed tears.

He dropped to his knees beside the bed, seized one of her hands, and kissed it frantically; then, little by little, he drew nearer to the thin face, which

started at the contact. One of the nurses was lighting them with a candle, and the doctor was watching them from the back of the room.

Then she said, in a voice which sounded as though it came from a distance: "I am going to die, dear; promise to stay to the end. Oh! don't leave me now. Don't leave me at the last minute!"

He kissed her face and her hair, and, weeping, he murmured: "Never fear, I will stay."

It was several minutes before she could speak again, she was so weak. She continued: "The little one is yours. I swear it before God and on my soul. I swear it as I am dying! I have never loved another man but you—promise to take care of the child."

He was trying to take this poor pain-racked body in his arms. Maddened by remorse and sorrow, he stammered: "I swear to you that I will bring him up and love him. He shall never leave me."

Then she tried to kiss Jacques. Powerless to lift her head, she held out her white lips in an appeal for a kiss. He approached his lips to pluck this poor caress.

As soon as she felt a little calmer, she murmured: "Bring him here, and let me see if you love him."

He went and got the child. He placed him gently on the bed between them, and the little one stopped crying. She murmured: "Don't move any more!" And he was quiet. And he stayed there, holding in his burning hand this other one shaken by the shivers of death, just as, a while ago, he had been holding a hand trembling with love.

From time to time he would cast a quick glance at the clock, which marked midnight, then one o'clock, then two.

The physician had returned; the two nurses, after noiselessly moving around through the room for a while, were now sleeping on chairs. The child was sleeping, and the mother, with eyes shut, appeared also to be resting.

Suddenly, just as pale daylight was creeping in behind the curtains, she stretched out her arms with such a quick and violent motion that she almost threw her baby on the floor. A kind of rattle was heard in her throat, then she lay on her back motionless, dead.

The nurses sprang forward and declared: "All is over!"

He looked once more at this woman whom he had so loved, then at the clock, which pointed to four, and he ran away, forgetting his overcoat, in evening dress, with the child in his arms.

After she had been left alone, the young wife had waited, calmly enough at first, in the little Japanese boudoir. Then, as she did not see him return, she went back to the parlour with an indifferent and calm appearance, but terribly anxious. When her mother saw her alone she asked: "Where is your husband?" She answered: "In his room; he is coming right back."

After an hour, when everybody had questioned her, she told about the letter, Jacques's upset appearance, and her fears of an accident.

Still they waited. The guests left; only the

nearest relatives remained. At midnight the bride was put to bed, all shaken by tears. Her mother and two aunts, sitting around the bed, were listening to her cry, silent and in despair. . . . The father had gone to the commissary of police to see if he could obtain some news.

At five o'clock a slight noise was heard in the hall; a door was softly opened and closed; then suddenly a little cry like the mewing of a cat was heard throughout the silent house.

All the women started forward, and Berthe sprang ahead of them all, pushing her way past her aunts, wrapped in a bathrobe.

Jacques stood in the middle of the room, pale and panting, holding an infant in his arms. The four women looked at him, astonished; but Berthe, who had suddenly become courageous, rushed forward with anguish in her heart, exclaiming: "What is it? What's the matter?"

He looked around wildly and answered shortly: "I—I have a child, and the mother has just died. . . ." And in his clumsy hands he held out the howling infant.

Without saying a word, Berthe seized the child, kissed it, and hugged it to her; then she raised her tear-filled eyes to him, asking: "Did you say that the mother was dead?" He answered: "Yes—in my arms . . . I had broken with her since summer . . . I knew nothing. The physician sent for me."

Then Berthe murmured: "Well, we will bring up the little one."

THE REVENGE

THE little Baroness de la Grangerie was slumbering on her sofa when the little Marquise de Rennedou entered quickly, with an excited appearance, her waist a little rumpled, her hat slightly awry, and she fell into a chair, exclaiming: "Ooof! That's over!"

Her friend, who knew her to be ordinarily calm and gentle, sat up in surprise, and asked: "What? What have you done?"

The Marquise, who seemed to be unable to stay in one place, stood up and began to walk around the room, then she threw herself down at the foot of the sofa where her friend was resting and took her hands, saying: "Listen, dear; swear to me never to repeat what I shall tell you!"

"I swear."

"On all that you hold holy!"

"On all that I hold holy."

"Well, I have just taken vengeance on Simon."

The other exclaimed: "Oh! you certainly did well."

"Didn't I, though? Why, for the last six months he has been even more unbearable than formerly. When I married him I knew that he was homely,

but I thought that he was kind. How mistaken I was! He undoubtedly thought that I loved him for himself, with his big stomach and his red nose, for he began to coo like a turtle-dove. As you can imagine, it made me laugh; from that time I called him 'Pigeon.'

"Really, men have funny ideas about themselves. When he understood that the only sentiment which I had for him was friendliness, he became suspicious, he began to say mean things about me, to call me a coquette, a sly person, I know not what. And then things became worse after . . . after . . . it's very hard to explain what I mean. . . . Well, he was very much in love with me . . . very much so . . . and he proved it to me often . . . too often. Oh! my dear, what torture to be . . . loved by a grotesque man. . . . No, really, I couldn't any longer . . . it was like having a tooth pulled out every evening . . . even worse; just imagine some one of your acquaintance who is very ugly, very ridiculous, very repulsive, with an enormous stomach . . . that's the worst part of it . . . and big, fat, hairy legs. You see what I mean, don't you? Well, just imagine that that person is your husband . . . and that . . . you understand. Oh! It's odious! Perfectly odious! . . . Positively, it—it made me ill—it actually gave me nausea. Really, this couldn't go on any longer. There ought to be some law to protect women in such a case.

"It's not because I have dreamed of poetic love;

no, I never did that. It is no longer to be found. All the men nowadays are grooms or bankers; they only love either horses or money, and if they love women it's the same way that they love horses; it is to show them off in their homes, just as they parade a beautiful pair of roans. Nothing more. Life is such to-day that sentiment can have no part in it.

"Let us, therefore, live like practical and indifferent women. Interrelations are no longer anything but regular meetings where each time the same things are said. For whom could we have a little affection and tenderness? The men, our men, are usually nothing more than very correct puppets who completely lack all intelligence and delicacy. If we look for a little wit, as one looks for water in the desert, we draw to us all the artists, and then we are surrounded by unbearable posers or ill-bred bohemians. Like Diogenes, I am looking for a man in the whole of Parisian society; but I am already quite sure that I will not find him, and it will not be long before I blow out my lantern. To return to my husband; as it thoroughly upset me to see him enter my room in his bare legs, I employed every means, every possible means, to keep him away and to—to disgust him with me. At first he was furious; then he became jealous; he imagined that I was deceiving him. In the beginning he was satisfied with watching me. He would watch every motion of any man who entered the house; then the persecution began. He followed me everywhere. He employed the most abominable means to sur-

prise me. After that he allowed me to speak with no one. At a ball he would stand behind me, pushing forward his thick dog's face as soon as I would say a word. He would follow me to the buffet, forbidding me to dance with this one or with that one, or else he would take me away in the middle of a cotillon, making me appear stupid and ridiculous. Then I ceased to go into society.

"In intimate life it became even worse. Just imagine, one day he called me . . I don't dare say the word, my dear! . . . In the evening he would say to me: 'Well, who was your lover to-day?' I would cry, and he would be delighted.

"It became even worse than that. Last week he took me to dinner on the Champs Elysées. Fate willed that Baubignac should be sitting at the next table. Then Simon began to crush my feet under the table, and to grunt at me: 'You had an engagement with him; just wait till I get hold of you!' Then, my dear, you can never imagine what he did: he gently drew my hat-pin out and stuck it into my arm. I uttered a shriek. Everybody crowded around us. Then he pretended to be sorry. You understand. Then I decided that I would avenge myself immediately. What would you have done in my place?"

"Why, I should have taken the same position!"

"Well, it's done."

"How?"

"What? Don't you understand?"

"But, my dear. . . ."

"Well, yes . . ."

"Yes, what?"

"Just imagine his expression. Can't you see him with his heavy face, his red nose, and his side whiskers, which hang like a dog's ears?"

"Yes."

"And then, think, he is as jealous as a cat!"

"Yes."

"Well," I said to myself: "I'm going to get revenge for myself and for Marie, for I fully expected to tell you, but only you. Just imagine his expression, and then think that he . . . he . . . he is . . ."

"What . . . you . . . ?"

"But, my dear, for goodness' sake, swear that you never will tell any one! But isn't it funny? . . . Why, from that time he seems to be entirely different! And I can't help laughing . . . all by myself . . . just think of him!"

The Baroness was looking at her friend, and she began to laugh wildly, hysterically, with her hands on her dress, her breath coming short, and leaning forward as if she would fall on her face.

Then the little Marquise also burst out in laughter, and she kept repeating: "Think . . . think of it . . . isn't it funny? . . . Can't you . . . can't you see him? . . . Think of his whiskers! . . . His nose! . . . Isn't it funny? . . . But . . . promise . . . promise never to tell!"

They were almost choking, unable to speak, crying real tears in this delirium of gayety. The

Baroness was the first to calm down, and, still out of breath, she asked: "Oh! Tell me how it happened . . . tell me . . . it's so . . . so funny! . . ."

But the other one was unable to speak; she kept stammering: "When I had taken my decision . . . I said to myself . . . 'Quickly . . . quickly . . . it must happen right away!' . . . And I . . . I did it to-day . . ."

"To-day! . . ."

"Yes . . . just a while ago . . . and I told Simon to meet me here so that we could have some fun. . . . He is coming . . . shortly! He is coming! . . Just . . . just . . . think of it when you look at him!"

The Baroness was panting as if she had been running a race. She continued: "Oh! tell me how you managed it . . . tell me! . . ."

"It's very simple. . . . I said to myself: 'He is jealous of Baubignac; well, Baubignac it shall be. He is as thick as a stone wall, but very honest. He would be incapable of telling anybody.' Then I went to his house after lunch."

"You went to see him? On what pretext?"

"A subscription . . . for the orphans . . ."

"Tell me . . . quick . . . tell me about it . . ."

"He was so surprised at seeing me that he was unable to speak. And then he gave me two louis for my subscription; and then, as I was rising to leave, he asked about my husband; then I pretended to be unable to contain myself any longer, and I

told him everything that was on my mind. I even made him out worse than he is! . . . Then Baubignac grew sorry for me, he tried to find some way of helping me . . . and I began to cry . . . as if my heart were broken . . . he tried to comfort me . . . and when I did not grow any calmer, he kissed me. . . . I kept repeating: 'Oh! my poor friend! . . . My poor friend!' He kept repeating: 'My poor friend! . . . my poor friend!' . . . And all the time he kept kissing me; and . . . and . . . there!

"After that I grew angry and heaped reproaches on him. Oh! I treated him as though he were the last of the last . . . but I felt a mad desire to laugh. I kept thinking of Simon and his whiskers! Just imagine . . . ! Just imagine! I simply couldn't keep my face straight as I was coming here. Just think of it! . . . It's done! . . . Whatever may happen now, it's done! And he was so afraid of that very thing! There may be wars, earthquakes, epidemics, we may all die . . . it's done! Nothing can help that! Think of it when you look at him!"

The Baroness, who was choking, asked: "Do you intend to see Baubignac again?"

"No, indeed! . . . I've had enough of him . . . he would be no better than my husband!"

And both of them began to laugh madly again. The tinkle of a bell interrupted their laughter.

The Marquise murmured: "It's he . . . look at him!"

The door opened. And a fat, red-faced man, with thick lips and hanging whiskers, appeared. He was rolling angry eyes.

The two young women looked at him for a minute, and then they threw themselves down upon the sofa, shaken by a fit of violent laughter.

And he kept repeating angrily: "What's the matter? Are you mad? . . . Are you mad? . . . Are you mad?"

THE WOODCOCKS

MY dear, you ask me why I do not return to Paris; you are surprised and almost angry. The reason which I will give you will probably shock you; does a hunter go to Paris during the season of the woodcocks?

Certainly, I like this city life which extends from the chamber to the sidewalk, but I prefer the free, rough autumn life of the hunter.

In Paris it seems to me as if I were never out of doors; for the streets are really nothing more than great apartments without ceilings. You are not outside when you are between two walls, your feet on the stone or wooden pavement, your view barred everywhere by buildings, without any horizon of pastures, plains, or forests. Thousands of neighbours elbow and push about, bow and speak; and the fact that I get water on my umbrella when it is raining is not sufficient to give me the impression, the sensation of space.

Here I perceive clearly and delightfully the difference between inside and outside . . . but it is not of that that I wish to speak to you. . . .

The woodcocks are here.

I must tell you that I live in a great country

house in Normandy, in a valley near a small river, and that I am hunting almost every day.

On other days I read; even things which men in Paris have no time to know, serious, deep, curious things written by a genius, a stranger who has spent his whole life studying the same question, and who has observed facts relative to the influence of the function of our organs on our intelligence.

But I want to tell you of the woodcocks. My two friends, the D'Orgemol brothers, and myself are remaining here throughout the hunting season, waiting for the first cold weather. As soon as there is a frost, we leave for their farm at Cannetot, near Fécamp, because there is there a delightful little forest where dwell all the passing woodcocks.

You know the D'Orgemols, these two giants of early Normandy, these two men of the ancient, conquering race which invaded France, took and kept England, settled along every coast of the old world, built cities everywhere, swept over Sicily and created an admirable art there, defeated all the kings, pillaged all the proud cities, overthrew and outwitted popes, and especially left children in every bed on the earth. The D'Orgemols are two typical Normans; everything about them flavours of Normandy, the voice, the accent, the wit, the blond hair, and the eyes, colour of the sea.

When we are together we speak in dialect, we live, think, act like Normans, we become more Norman than our farmers themselves.

Well, we have been expecting the woodcocks for the last two weeks. Every morning the elder

brother, Simon, would say to me: "Well, the wind is turning to the east; there is going to be a frost; they'll be here in a couple of days."

The younger brother, Gaspard, more precise, would wait until the frost was there before announcing it.

Last Thursday he came into my room at daybreak, and cried: "It's here! The whole ground is white. Two more days like this and we'll leave for Cannetot."

And, in fact, two days later we were leaving for Cannetot. You certainly would have laughed if you could have seen us. We were travelling in a strange hunting wagon which my father had formerly constructed. "Construct" is the only word which I can use when speaking of this monumental traveller, or, rather, of this rolling earthquake. It contains everything: boxes for provisions, boxes for weapons, for trunks, for everything that is necessary. Everything is under cover except the men, who have to sit on benches as high as a third-story window, and supported by four gigantic wheels. One gets up there as best one can, making use of the feet, hands, and even the teeth, for no step gives access to this edifice.

The two D'Orgemols and myself scramble up on this mountain, dressed like Laplanders. We are wearing sheepskins, thick woollen stockings over our trousers, and gaiters over our stockings; besides this, we wear black fur hats and white fur gloves. When we are settled, Jean, my servant, throws up our three dogs, Pif, Paf, and Moustache.

Pif belongs to Simon, Paf to Gaspard, and Moustache to me. They look like three hairy little crocodiles. They are long, close to the earth, with crooked legs and very hairy. One can hardly see their black eyes under the hair, and their white fangs under their beards. We never shut them up in the rolling kennels of the wagon. We make our dogs lie at our feet, in order to keep ourselves warm. We leave, and get abominably shaken up. The weather was freezing. We were pleased. We arrived at about five. The farmer, Maître Picot, was waiting before the door. He is a strapping fellow, not tall, but short and stocky, as vigorous as a bulldog, as sly as a fox, always smiling, always happy, and making money out of everything.

The woodcock season is a great time for him. The farmhouse is a big rambling building, with a yard full of apple trees, and surrounded by four hedges. We go into the kitchen, where a big fire is burning in honour of our arrival.

The table is set near the high fireplace, where everything is cooking; in front of the bright flame is a plump chicken, the gravy from which is dripping into an earthen vessel.

The farmer's wife comes up and treats us. She is a big, silent, very polite woman, always busy with her housekeeping, her head full of business and figures, the price of grain, of poultry, sheep, cattle. She is an orderly and severe woman, known throughout the neighbourhood.

In the back of the kitchen is the big table where shortly the servants of every description, truck

drivers, labourers, farm girls, shepherds, will sit down; and all these people will eat in silence under the active eye of the mistress, and watch us dine with Maître Picot, who will tell us jokes. Then, when the employees shall have eaten, Madame Picot will take her frugal meal alone, on a corner of the table, while she watches the maid. On ordinary days she eats with the others.

The D'Orgemols and myself, all three of us, sleep in a large, bare whitewashed room which contains only our three beds, three chairs, and three wash-basins. Gaspard always wakes first, and he rouses the rest of us. In a half hour everybody is ready, and we leave with Maître Picot, who hunts with us.

Maître Picot prefers me to his masters. Why? Doubtless because I am not his master. The two of us reach the woods from the right-hand side, while the two brothers attack it from the left. Simon takes care of the dogs, which he drags along, all three on one leash. For we are not hunting woodcock, but rabbits. We are convinced that one should not hunt woodcock, but find it. You run across it and kill it, that's all. If you try to look for it you will never find it. It is really a beautiful and curious thing to hear, in the fresh morning air, the sharp explosion of the guns, and then Gaspard's stentorian voice fill the air and cry: "Woodcock!"

I am sly. When I have killed a woodcock, I cry: "Rabbit!" And my triumph is double when the game is taken from the bags at noon.

Well, Maître Picot and I are in the little forest,

where the leaves are falling with a soft and continuous rustle, a sad, dry noise; they are dead. It is cold, a cold which stings the eyes, the nose and the ears, and which has powdered the grass and the brown ground with a white powder. But under the long sheepskins we feel warm. The sun looks gay in the blue sky; it is scarcely warm at all, but it is gay. How delightful it is to hunt through the woods on a fresh winter's morning!

A dog barks sharply. It is Pif. I know his voice. Then nothing more. I hear a cry, then another; then Paf in turn makes himself heard. What can Moustache be doing? Ah! there he is, clucking like a strangled chicken. They have found a rabbit. They go away, draw nearer, go off again, then return; we follow their unexpected tracks, running along the little paths, our minds alert and our fingers on the trigger.

They go out toward the fields, we follow them. Suddenly a gray shadow crosses the path. I throw my gun to my shoulder and shoot. The light smoke clears off in the blue air, and I see a bundle of white hair kicking about on the grass. Then I bawl at the top of my lungs: "Rabbit! rabbit!" Then I show it to the three dogs, to the three hairy crocodiles, who congratulate me by wagging their tails; then they go to look for another.

Maître Picot had joined me. Moustache began to bark. The farmer said: "It might be a hare; let us go to the edge of the field."

But just as I was leaving the woods I saw, standing right near me, Maître Picot's dumb shepherd,

Gargan; he was wrapped in an immense yellow cloak, his head was covered by a woollen bonnet, and he was knitting a stocking. According to the custom, I said: "Good morning, pastor." He raised his hand to greet me, although he had not heard my voice; but he had seen the movement of my lips. I had known this shepherd for fifteen years. For fifteen years I had seen him every autumn standing in the middle or at the edge of a field, his body motionless, and his hands always knitting. His herd followed him, and seemed to obey his glances.

Maître Picot pressed my arm, and said: "Did you know that the shepherd killed his wife?"

I was dumfounded, and asked: "What? Gargan? The deaf and dumb one?"

"Yes, last winter. He was tried at Rouen. I'll tell you about it." He dragged me behind the bushes, for the dumb man could gather the words from his master's mouth as though he could hear them. He was the only man that he could understand; but in front of him he was no longer deaf, and the master, on the other hand, could guess like a sorcerer every intention of the dumb man's pantomime, every motion of his fingers, every wrinkle of his face and glance of his eyes.

Here is this simple story, a sombre tragedy such as sometimes happens in the country:

Gargan was the son of a marl-digger, one of these men who go down into the marl pits in order to extract this soft, white, crumbling rock, which is then scattered over the fields. He was deaf and dumb at birth, and had been brought up to herd

beasts. Then, when Picot's father took him in, he became the shepherd of the farm. He was an excellent shepherd, devoted and honest, and he knew how to heal broken members, although nobody had ever taught him anything about that. When Picot took the farm Gargan was thirty and looked forty. He was tall and thin, and wore the beard of a patriarch.

At about this time a poor old woman, by the name of Martel, died, leaving a fifteen-year-old girl, who was called "Brandy" on account of her inordinate love for this drink.

Picot took in this girl and employed her to do little things, feeding her free, in exchange for her work. She would sleep in the carriage house, in the stable, on the straw, or on the dungheap; everywhere and anywhere, with any one, perhaps with the truck driver or with the hodman. But soon she began to be seen regularly in the company of the deaf man. How did these two wretches unite? How did they understand each other? Had he ever known a woman before this one—he who had never spoken to anybody? Was it she who first went to his rolling hut and seduced him, an Eve of the roadside? No one knows. It is only known that one day they began to live together as husband and wife. Nobody was surprised. And Picot even found this quite natural.

But the priest heard of this union without consecration, and grew angry. He reproached Madame Picot, worried her conscience, threatened her with mysterious punishments. What was to be done? It

was quite simple. They would be married in the church and by the Mayor. Neither of them had anything; he did not own a whole pair of pants, and she did not have a skirt that hung together. Therefore nothing could stand in the way of satisfying religion and the law. They were united in an hour, before Mayor and priest, and everybody thought that everything was for the best.

But soon it became a regular game throughout the countryside to deceive this poor Gargan. Before they had been married nobody ever thought of going with Brandy, and now everybody wanted her, just as a joke. It only took a glass of brandy to persuade the woman to deceive her husband. The affair had gained such notoriety throughout the neighbourhood that gentlemen came from Goderville to watch the game. For a pint Brandy would give an exhibition with anybody, in a ditch, behind a wall, while at the same time one could see Gargan standing motionless a hundred feet away, knitting his stockings and followed by his bleating herd. And people would laugh themselves sick over the matter in every café of the neighbourhood; it was the great topic of conversation. People would greet each other by crying: "Have you treated Brandy?" Everybody knew what that meant.

The shepherd seemed to see nothing. But one day a fellow from Sassedille, by the name of Poirot, called Gargan's wife aside and showed her a full bottle behind a mill. She understood and laughingly came to him. They had hardly begun their

criminal business when the shepherd fell upon them as though he had dropped from the clouds. Poirot escaped as best he could, while the dumb man, with animal-like cries, kept squeezing his wife's throat.

The people who had been working in the fields hastened to the scene. It was too late; her tongue was black, her eyes were popping out of her head, and blood was flowing from her nose. She was dead.

The murderer was tried at Rouen. As he was dumb people acted as his interpreters. The details of the affair greatly amused the audience. But the farmer was possessed by only one idea: to have his shepherd acquitted; and he went about the matter in a cunning manner.

He first told the whole of the deaf man's history, and that of his marriage; then he came to the crime and questioned the murderer himself. The whole audience was silent.

Picot asked slowly: "Did you know that she was deceiving you?" and at the same time he mimicked the question with his eyes.

The other answered: "No," with his head.

"Were you sleeping in the mill when you surprised her?" And he made the gesture of a man who sees a disgusting sight.

Then the farmer imitated the motions of the Mayor who marries and the priest who unites in the name of God, and asked his servant if he had killed his wife because she was bound to him before all men and before Heaven.

The shepherd said: "Yes," with his head.

Picot said: "Now, show us how it happened."

Then the deaf man went over the whole scene. He showed how he had been sleeping in the mill, that he had awakened when he felt something moving in the straw, that he had gently looked and had seen the thing.

He was standing between two gendarmes, and suddenly he imitated the obscene motions of the couple before him.

A loud burst of laughter filled the courtroom, then stopped short; for the shepherd, with haggard eyes, was moving his jaws and his great beard as if he were biting something, his arms stretched out, his head shoved forward, repeating the terrible action of the murderer strangling some creature.

And he was howling frightfully, so maddened by anger that he thought that he was holding her again, and the gendarmes were obliged to force him down on a bench in order to calm him.

A thrill of anguish ran through the audience. Then Maître Picot placed his hand on his servant's shoulder and said quietly: "This man has honour."

The shepherd was acquitted.

For my part, my dear, I was greatly moved by the last part of this adventure, which I have told you in quite vulgar terms, in order to change nothing of the farmer's story. Suddenly I heard a shot coming from the woods, and Gaspard's rumbling voice came to me like a cannon: "Woodcock!"

And that is how I spend my time watching for the woodcocks, while you go to the Bois to observe the first winter gowns.

ON THE RAILWAY

THE sun was about to disappear behind the great chain of mountains of which the Puy de Dôme is the giant, and the shadow of the peaks stretched into the Valley Royat.

A few persons were walking through the park around the bandstand; others were sitting in groups, notwithstanding the coolness of the evening. In one of these groups the conversation was animated, for the question was one which greatly bothered Mesdames de Sarcagnes, De Vaulacelles, and De Bridoie. Vacations were to begin in a few days, and they had to send for their sons, who were being educated by the Jesuits and the Dominicans.

Now, these ladies had no desire themselves to undertake a journey to fetch their descendants, and they knew of no one to whom they could intrust this delicate mission. It was the end of July. Paris was empty. They were searching in vain for a name which offered them sufficient guaranty.

Their embarrassment grew when they heard of a great breach of morality which had happened on a railway train a few days previously. And the ladies were positive that all the gay girls of the

whole capital spent their lives on the expresses between Auvergne and the Lyons Station. According to M. de Bridoie, of the *Gil Blas,* all these women had gone to Vichy, Mont Doré, and Bourboule. In order to get there they must have gone on the railway, and they would again undoubtedly come back by the same means of transportation; they must probably be going back and forth every day. It was, therefore, a continual coming and going of naughty people on that confounded line. The ladies were most distressed that entrance to the stations should not be forbidden to suspicious women.

Now, Roger de Sarcagnes was fifteen, Gontran de Vaulacelles thirteen, and Roland de Bridoie eleven. What was to be done? They could not expose their dear children to the contact of such creatures. What might they not hear? What might they not learn if they were to spend a whole day or night in a compartment which contained one or two of these persons, with a couple of their companions?

The situation seemed to be absolutely hopeless, when Madame de Martinsec happened to pass. She stopped to greet her friends, who told her their troubles.

"Why, the matter is quite simple," she exclaimed. "I will lend you the Abbé. I can very well get along without him for forty-eight hours. Rodolphe's education will not be compromised by that. He can go for your children and bring them back again."

Thus it was agreed upon that Abbé Lecuir, a

well-educated young priest, Rodolphe de Martinsec's tutor, should go to Paris the following week in order to fetch the three boys.

The Abbé left on Friday, and on Sunday morning he was at the Lyons Station, ready to take the eight o'clock train with his three boys. This was a new express, which had been organized for only a few days by request of all the Auvergne bathers.

He was walking along, followed by his brood, and looking for an empty compartment, or for one occupied by respectable-looking people, for his mind was haunted by all the minute warnings of Mesdames de Sarcagnes, De Vaulacelles, and De Bridoie.

Suddenly he noticed an old gentleman and a white-haired old lady, who were talking to another lady already settled in the compartment. The old gentleman was an officer of the Legion of Honour, and these people looked quite respectable. "This is what I want," thought the Abbé. He told the three boys to go in, and followed them.

The old lady was saying: "Be sure to take care, my child."

The young one answered: "Oh! yes, mamma, fear nothing."

"Call the doctor as soon as you feel sick."

"Yes, yes, mamma."

"Good-by, my child."

"Good-by, mamma."

After lengthy farewells a conductor closed the doors, and the train started.

They were alone. The delighted Abbé was con-

gratulating himself on his skill, and he began to talk to the young people who had been confided to his care. It had been decided on the day of his departure that Madame de Martinsec would allow him to give lessons to these three boys during the vacations, and he wished to test the intelligence and character of his new scholars.

The oldest one, Roger de Sarcagnes, was one of these tall schoolboys who have grown beyond their age, thin and pale, and whose pronunciation did not yet seem to be quite settled. He spoke slowly and simply.

Gontran de Vaulacelles, on the contrary, was short and stocky, and he was tricky, sly, bad, and mischievous. He was continually making fun of everybody, spoke like a grown person, and said things with double meanings, which worried his parents.

The youngest lad, Roland de Bridoie, seemed to show no special aptitude for anything. He was a harmless little creature, who would some day resemble his father.

The Abbé had informed them that they would be under his orders during these two summer months; and he had given them a little lecture on their duties toward him, the policy he should pursue, and the method he should employ with them. He was an honest-hearted and simple priest, with a mind full of systems.

His speech was interrupted by a deep sigh from his neighbour. He turned and looked at her. She was in her corner, her eyes fixed on the floor, her

cheeks a little pale. The Abbé returned to his pupils.

The train was rolling along at full speed, through fields and forests, passing under and over bridges, shaking up the little company of travellers shut up in the compartments.

Gontran de Vaulacelles was now questioning Abbé Lecuir about Royat as to what amusement could be found in the country. Was there a river? How was the fishing? Should he have a horse, as he had the year before?

The young woman suddenly uttered a sharp cry, an "Ah!" of suffering, quickly repressed.

The priest anxiously asked her: "Are you feeling ill, Madame?"

She answered: "No, no, Monsieur l'Abbé, it's nothing at all, just a slight pain. I have not been well for the last few days, and the motion of the train tires me."

Her face had indeed become quite livid. He insisted: "If I can do anything at all for you, Madame——"

"Oh! no, nothing at all, thank you, Monsieur l'Abbé."

The priest again took up his conversation with his pupils, preparing them for the instructions they were to receive under his direction.

Hours rolled by. The train stopped from time to time, and then started again. The young woman now appeared to be asleep and she was no longer moving, huddled up in her corner. Although the day was half over, she had as yet eaten nothing.

The Abbé thought: "This person must be quite ill."

Only two hours remained before they were due to arrive at Clermont-Ferrand, when the woman suddenly began to moan. She had almost fallen from her seat, and, leaning against her hands, her eyes haggard, her features contorted, she kept repeating: "Oh! my God! Oh! my God!"

The Abbé rushed to her aid, exclaiming: "Madame! Madame! Madame, what is the matter?"

She stammered: "I—I—I think that—that I am going to give birth!" And she immediately began to shriek in a frightful manner. She let out a maddening cry which seemed to rasp her throat, shrill and terrible, which told of the agony of her soul and the torture of her body.

The poor priest stood bewildered before her, not knowing what to do, to say, to attempt, and he kept murmuring: "Gracious! if I only knew—gracious, if I only knew!" He had blushed to the tips of his ears, and his three pupils looked in a dazed manner at this prostrate, shrieking woman.

Suddenly she twisted, raised her arms over her head, and seemed to be shaken by a strange convulsion.

The Abbé thought that she was about to die—die beside him, deprived of aid and assistance, by his fault. Then he said in a resolute voice:

"I will help you, Madame. I do not know—but I will help you as best I can. I owe my assistance to every suffering creature."

Then he turned around to the three youngsters

and cried: "You boys are to stick your heads out of the window, and if one of you turns around he shall copy a thousand lines of Virgil."

He lowered the three windows and stuck the three heads through them and pulled the shades down; then he repeated: "If you make one single motion you shall be deprived of your excursions throughout all the holidays. And do not forget that I never forgive."

Rolling up the sleeves of his cassock, he returned.

She was still moaning, and at times shrieking. The Abbé, with a pained expression, kept assisting her, exhorting her and comforting her, and he continually kept one eye on the three youngsters, who were casting quick and secret glances toward the mysterious business which was being carried on by their new tutor.

"Monsieur de Vaulacelles, you will copy the verb 'to disobey' twenty times!" he cried.

"Monsieur de Bridoie, you shall have no dessert for a month!"

Suddenly the young woman stopped her complaining, and almost immediately a strange and faint cry, like that of a cat, caused the three schoolboys to turn around with a start, convinced that they had heard a new-born puppy.

The Abbé was holding in his hands a tiny naked infant. He was looking around with a bewildered expression; he seemed pleased and sad, ready to laugh and cry; the facial expression varied so suddenly that one might have thought him to be a lunatic.

He announced to his pupils, as if it were a great piece of news: "It's a boy."

Then immediately he continued: "Monsieur de Sarcagnes, pass me the bottle of water which is in the net. Very well. Open it. Good. Pour just a few drops in my hand, just a few—that's enough!"

And he poured this water over the bare brow of the little creature which he was holding in his arms; then he said: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The train was rolling into the station of Clermont. Madame de Bridoie's face appeared at the door. Then the Abbé completely lost his head and presented to her the frail human creature, murmuring: "Madame has just had a little accident during the journey."

He looked as if he had picked this child up out of the gutter. Perspiration was standing out on his brow, and his cassock was all rumpled up. He kept repeating: "They saw nothing—nothing at all—I guarantee it. All three of them were looking through the window. I guarantee it—they saw nothing at all."

And he left the compartment with four boys, instead of the three which he had been sent to fetch; while Mesdames de Bridoie, De Vaulacelles, and De Sarcagnes, livid, exchanged bewildered looks, without finding a single thing to say.

That evening the three families were dining together in order to celebrate the return of the schoolboys. The conversation lagged; fathers,

mothers, and even the children themselves looked preoccupied.

Suddenly the youngest one, Roland de Bridoie, asked:

"Say, mamma, where did the Abbé find the little boy?"

The mother merely answered: "Eat your dinner, and don't trouble us with your questions."

He was silent for a short while, and then continued: "There was nobody but this lady, who had a stomach-ache. The Abbé must be a prestidigitator like Robert Houdin, who brings a bowl full of fishes from under a handkerchief."

"Keep quiet. It was God who sent it."

"But where did God put it? I didn't see anything. Did he come in through the window, tell me?"

Madame de Bridoie impatiently answered: "Oh, be still. The stork brought him, as he does all other children. You know it very well."

"But there wasn't any stork on the train!"

Then Gontran de Vaulacelles, who had been listening, smiled slyly and said: "Yes, there was a stork. But Monsieur l'Abbé was the only one who saw it."

MADAME BAPTISTE

THE first thing I did was to look at the clock as I entered the waiting-room of the station at Loubain, and I found that I had to wait two hours and ten minutes for the Paris express.

I had walked twenty miles and felt suddenly tired. Not seeing anything on the station walls to amuse me, I went outside and stood there racking my brains to think of something to do. The street was a kind of boulevard, planted with acacias, and on either side a row of houses of varying shape and different styles of architecture, houses such as one only sees in a small town, and ascended a slight hill, at the extreme end of which there were some trees, as though it ended in a park.

From time to time a cat crossed the street and jumped over the gutters, carefully. A cur sniffed at every tree and hunted for scraps from the kitchens, but I did not see a single human being, and I felt listless and disheartened. What could I do with myself? I was already thinking of the inevitable and interminable visit to the small café at the railway station, where I should have to sit over a glass of undrinkable beer and the illegible newspaper, when I saw a funeral procession coming out

of a side street into the one in which I was, and the sight of the hearse was a relief to me. It would, at any rate, give me something to do for ten minutes. Suddenly, however, my curiosity was aroused. The hearse was followed by eight gentlemen, one of whom was weeping, while the others were chatting together, but there was no priest, and I thought to myself:

"This is a non-religious funeral;" and then I reflected that a town like Loubain must contain at least a hundred freethinkers, who would have made a point of making a manifestation. What could it be, then? The rapid pace of the procession clearly proved that the body was to be buried without ceremony, and, consequently, without the intervention of the church.

My idle curiosity framed the most complicated surmises, and as the hearse passed me, a strange idea struck me, which was to follow it, with the eight gentlemen. That would take up my time for an hour, at least, and I, accordingly, walked with the others, with a sad look on my face, and, on seeing this, the two last turned round in surprise, and then spoke to each other in a low voice.

No doubt, they were asking each other whether I belonged to the town, and then they consulted the two in front of them, who stared at me in turn. This close scrutiny annoyed me, and to put an end to it, I went up to them, and, after bowing, I said:

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, for interrupting your conversation, but, seeing a civil funeral, I

have followed it, although I did not know the deceased gentleman whom you are accompanying."

"It was a woman," one of them said.

I was much surprised at hearing this, and asked: "But it is a civil funeral, is it not?"

The other gentleman, who evidently wished to tell me all about it, then said: "Yes and no. The clergy have refused to allow us the use of the church."

On hearing this, I uttered a prolonged "A—h!" of astonishment. I could not understand it at all, but my obliging neighbour continued:

"It is rather a long story. This young woman committed suicide, and that is the reason why she cannot be buried with any religious ceremony. The gentleman who is walking first, and who is crying, is her husband."

I replied, with some hesitation:

"You surprise and interest me very much, Monsieur. Shall I be indiscreet if I ask you to tell me the facts of the case? If I am troubling you, forget that I have said anything about the matter."

The gentleman took my arm familiarly.

"Not at all, not at all. Let us linger a little behind the others, and I will tell it you, although it is a very sad story. We have plenty of time before getting to the cemetery, the trees of which you see up yonder, for it is a stiff pull up this hill."

And he began:

"This young woman, Madame Paul Hamot, was the daughter of a wealthy merchant in the neighbourhood, Monsieur Fontanelle. When she was a

mere child of eleven, she had a terrible adventure; a footman attacked her and she nearly died. A terrible criminal case was the result, and the man was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

"The little girl grew up, stigmatized by disgrace, isolated, without any companions, and grown-up people would scarcely kiss her, for they thought that they would soil their lips if they touched her forehead, and she became a sort of monster, a phenomenon to all the town. People said to each other in a whisper: 'You know, little Fontanelle,' and everybody turned away in the streets when she passed. Her parents could not even get a nurse to take her out for a walk, as the other servants held aloof from her, as if contact with her would poison everybody who came near her.

"It was pitiable to see the poor child go and play every afternoon. She remained quite by herself, standing by her maid, and looking at the other children amusing themselves. Sometimes, yielding to an irresistible desire to mix with the other children, she advanced timidly, with nervous gestures, and mingled with a group, with furtive steps, as if conscious of her own disgrace. And, immediately, the mothers, aunts, and nurses would come running from every seat, and take the children intrusted to their care by the hand and drag them brutally away.

"Little Fontanelle remained isolated, wretched, without understanding what it meant, and then she began to cry, nearly heartbroken with grief, and

then she used to run and hide her head in her nurse's lap, sobbing.

"As she grew up, it was worse still. They kept the girls from her, as if she were stricken with the plague. Remember that she had nothing to learn, nothing; that she no longer had the right to the symbolical wreath of orange-flowers; that almost before she could read she had penetrated that redoubtable mystery which mothers scarcely allow their daughters to guess at, trembling as they enlighten them on the night of their marriage.

"When she went through the streets, always accompanied by her governess, as if her parents feared some fresh, terrible adventure, with her eyes cast down under the load of that mysterious disgrace which she felt was always weighing upon her, the other girls, who were not nearly so innocent as people thought, whispered and giggled as they looked at her knowingly, and immediately turned their heads absently, if she happened to look at them. People scarcely greeted her; only a few men bowed to her, and the mothers pretended not to see her, while some young blackguards called her Madame Baptiste, after the name of the footman who had attacked her.

"Nobody knew the secret torture of her mind, for she hardly ever spoke, and never laughed, and her parents themselves appeared uncomfortable in her presence, as if they bore her a constant grudge for some irreparable fault.

"An honest man would not willingly give his hand to a liberated convict, would he, even if that

convict were his own son? And Monsieur and Madame Fontanelle looked on their daughter as they would have done on a son who had just been released from the hulks. She was pretty and pale, tall, slender, distinguished-looking, and she would have pleased me very much, Monsieur, but for that unfortunate affair.

"Well, when a new sub-prefect was appointed here, eighteen months ago, he brought his private secretary with him. He was a queer sort of fellow, who had lived in the Latin Quarter, it appears. He saw Mademoiselle Fontanelle, and fell in love with her, and when told of what occurred, he merely said: 'Bah! That is just a guarantee for the future, and I would rather it should have happened before I married her than afterward. I shall live tranquilly with that woman.'

"He paid his addresses to her, asked for her hand, and married her, and then, not being deficient in assurance, he paid wedding-calls, as if nothing had happened. Some people returned them, others did not; but, at last, the affair began to be forgotten, and she took her proper place in society.

"She adored her husband as if he had been a god; for, you must remember, he had restored her to honour and to social life, had braved public opinion, faced insults, and, in a word, performed such a courageous act as few men would undertake, and she felt the most exalted and tender love for him.

"When she became *enceinte,* and it was known, the most particular people and the greatest sticklers

opened their doors to her, as if she had been definitely purified by maternity.

"It is strange, but so it is, and thus everything was going on as well as possible until the other day, which was the feast of the patron saint of our town. The Prefect, surrounded by his staff and the authorities, presided at the musical competition, and when he had finished his speech the distribution of medals began, which Paul Hamot, his private secretary, handed to those who were entitled to them.

"As you know, there are always jealousies and rivalries, which make people forget all propriety. All the ladies of the town were there on the platform, and, in his turn, the bandmaster from the village of Mourmillon came up. This band was only to receive a second-class medal, for one cannot give first-class medals to everybody, can one? But when the private secretary handed him his badge, the man threw it in his face and exclaimed:

"'You may keep your medal for Baptiste. You owe him a first-class one, also, just as you do me.'

"There were a number of people there who began to laugh. The common herd are neither charitable nor refined, and every eye was turned toward that poor lady. Have you ever seen a woman going mad, Monsieur? Well, we were present at the sight! She got up, and fell back on her chair three times in succession, as if she wished to make her escape, but saw that she could not make her way through the crowd, and then another voice in the crowd exclaimed:

"'Oh! Oh! Madame Baptiste!'

"And a great uproar, partly of laughter and partly of indignation, arose. The word was repeated over and over again; people stood on tiptoe to see the unhappy woman's face; husbands lifted their wives up in their arms, so that they might see her, and people asked:

"'Which is she? The one in blue?'

"The boys crowed like cocks, and laughter was heard all over the place.

"She did not move now on her state chair, but sat just as if she had been put there for the crowd to look at. She could not move, nor conceal herself, nor hide her face. Her eyelids blinked quickly, as if a vivid light were shining on them, and she breathed heavily like a horse that is going up a steep hill, so that it almost broke one's heart to see her. Meanwhile, however, Monsieur Hamot had seized the ruffian by the throat, and they were rolling on the ground together, amid a scene of indescribable confusion, and the ceremony was interrupted.

"An hour later, as the Hamots were returning home, the young woman, who had not uttered a word since the insult, but who was trembling as if all her nerves had been set in motion by springs, suddenly sprang over the parapet of the bridge, and threw herself into the river, before her husband could prevent her. The water is very deep under the arches, and it was two hours before her body was recovered. Of course, she was dead."

The narrator stopped, and then added:

"It was, perhaps, the best thing she could do

under the circumstances. There are some things which cannot be wiped out, and now you understand why the clergy refused to have her taken into church. Ah! If it had been a religious funeral the whole town would have been present, but you can understand that her suicide added to the other affair and made families abstain from attending her funeral; and then, it is not an easy matter here to attend a funeral which is performed without religious rites."

We passed through the cemetery gates, and I waited, much moved by what I had heard, until the coffin had been lowered into the grave, before I went up to the poor fellow who was sobbing violently, to press his hand warmly. He looked at me in surprise through his tears, and then said:

"Thank you, Monsieur." And I was not sorry that I had followed the funeral.

A WARNING NOTE

I HAVE received the following letter. Thinking that it may be profitable to many readers, I lost no time in communicating to them its contents:

"PARIS, November 15th, 1886.

"MONSIEUR: You often, either in the form of short stories or chronicles, deal with subjects relating to what I may describe as 'current morals.' I am going to submit to you some reflections which ought, it seems to me, to furnish you with the materials for one of your tales.

"I am not married; I am a bachelor, and, as it seems to me, a rather simple man. But I fancy that many men, the greater number of men, are simple in the way that I am. Acting always, or nearly always, in good faith myself, I am unable to understand the inherent astuteness of my neighbours, and I look straight before me as I proceed, without being sufficiently on my guard against hidden motives, secret actions.

"We are nearly all accustomed as a rule to take things as they appear, and to take people at their own valuation; and very few possess that perception which enables certain men to divine the real and

hidden nature of others. From this peculiar and conventional attitude in regard to life we have come to this, that we pass like moles through the midst of events, and that we never believe in what really is, but in what appears to be, that as soon as we are shown the fact behind the veil we declare that it is not true to life, and that everything which displeases our idealistic morality is classed by us as an exception, without taking into account that these exceptions all brought together constitute nearly the sum total of cases. Another result of this is that credulous good people like me are deceived by everybody, and especially by women, who have a talent in this direction.

"I have started far afield in order to come to the particular fact which interests me. I have a sweetheart, a married woman. Like many others, I imagined, of course, that I had chanced on an exception, on an unhappy little woman who was deceiving her husband for the first time. I had paid attentions to her, or, rather, I had looked on myself as having paid attention to her for a long time, as having overcome her scruples by dint of kindness and love, and as having triumphed by the sheer force of perseverance. In fact, I had made use of a thousand precautions, a thousand devices, and a thousand subtle dallyings in order to succeed in getting the better of her.

"Now, here is what happened last week: Her husband being absent for some days, she suggested that we should both dine together, and that I should wait on myself so as to avoid the presence of

a man-servant. She had a fixed idea which had haunted her for the last four or five months: She wanted to become intoxicated, without being afraid of consequences, without having to go back home, or to speak to her chambermaid and to walk before witnesses. She had often taken a little too much without going farther, and she had enjoyed it. So she promised herself that she would become intoxicated for once, only once, but thoroughly so. She pretended at her own house that she was going to spend twenty-four hours with some friends near Paris, and she reached my abode just about dinner-hour.

"A woman naturally ought not to get drunk on anything but champagne frappé. She drank a large glass of it fasting, and before the oysters were served she was talking incoherently.

"We had a cold dinner spread on a table behind me. All I had to do was to reach out my arm and take the dishes or plates, and I did the honours indifferently well as I listened to her chattering.

"She kept taking swallows, haunted by her fixed idea. She began by making me the recipient of meaningless and interminable confidences about her sensations as a young girl. She went on and on, her eyes wandering and sparkling, her tongue loosed, as her frivolous ideas poured forth just as tape is rolled off a ticker.

"From time to time she asked me:

"'Am I tipsy?'

"'No, not yet.'

"And she went on drinking.

"She was so before long, not so as to lose her senses, but tipsy enough to tell the truth, as it seemed to me.

"Her confidences as to her emotions while a young girl were succeeded by more intimate confidences as to her relations with her husband. She made them without restraint till I was embarrassed, saying continually: 'I can tell everything to you. To whom could I tell everything if it were not to you?' So I was made acquainted with all the habits, all the defects, all the fads and the most secret inclinations of her husband.

"And by way of claiming my approval she asked: 'Isn't he a duffer? Do you think he can get ahead of me, eh? And the first time I saw you, I said to myself, "Let me see! I like him, and I'll take him for my lover." It was then you began paying me attention.'

"I must have presented an odd appearance, for she burst out laughing, exclaiming: 'Oh, you big simpleton, you did go about it cautiously; but when men pay us attention, you old stupid, it is because we permit it. A man must be a fool not to understand, by a mere glance at us, that we mean "Yes." Ah! I believe I waited for you, booby! Oh! yes, flowers, verses, compliments, more verses, and nothing else! I was very near letting you go, my fine fellow, you were so long in making up your mind. And only to think that half the men in the world are like you, while the other half, ha! ha! ha!'

"This laugh of hers sent a cold shiver down my

back. I stammered: 'The other half—what about the other half?'

"She still went on drinking, her eyes sparkling from the wine, her mind impelled by the imperious necessity to tell the truth which sometimes takes possession of drunkards.

"She replied: 'Ah! the other half makes quick work of it—too quick; but, all the same, they are right. There are days when we don't agree; but there are days, too, when all goes right, in spite of everything. . . . My dear, if you only knew how funny it is—the way the two kinds of men act! You see, the timid ones, such as you are, never could imagine what sort the others are and what they do, immediately, as soon as they find themselves alone with us. They are regular dare-devils! They get many a slap in the face from us, no doubt of that, but what does that matter? They know we're the sort that kiss and don't tell! They know us well, they do!'

"I stared at her with the eyes of an inquisitor, and with a mad desire to make her speak, to learn everything from her. How often had I put this question to myself: 'How do the other men behave toward the women who belong to us?' I was fully conscious of the fact that, from the way I saw two men talking to the same woman publicly in a drawing-room, these two men, if they found themselves, one after the other, all alone with her, would conduct themselves quite differently, although they were both equally well acquainted with her. We can guess at the first glance of the eye that certain

beings, naturally endowed with the power of seduction, or, perhaps, more lively, more daring than we are, attain after an hour's chat with a woman who pleases them a degree of intimacy that we would not hope for in a year. Well, these men, these seducers, these bold adventurers, when the occasion presents itself to them, take liberties which we timid ones would consider odious outrages, but which women, perhaps, look on merely as pardonable effrontery, as indecent homage to their irresistible grace.

"So I asked her: 'There are some men, are there not, who are very improper?'

"She threw herself back in her chair in order to laugh more at her ease, but with a nerveless, unhealthy laugh, one of those laughs which ends in an attack of nerves; then, a little more calmly, she replied: 'Ha! ha! my dear, improper? That is to say, that they dare everything at once, all, you understand, and many other things, too.'

"I felt disgusted as if she had just revealed to me a monstrous thing.

"'And you permit this, you women?'

"'No, we don't permit it; we slap them in the face, but, for all that, they amuse us! And then with them one is always afraid, one is never easy. You must keep watching them the whole time; it is like fighting a duel. You have to keep staring into their eyes to see what they are thinking of or where they are putting their hands. They are blackguards, if you like, but they love us better than you do.'

"A singular and unexpected sensation stole over me. Although a bachelor and determined to remain a bachelor, I suddenly felt in my breast the spirit of a husband in the face of this impudent confidence. I felt myself the friend, the ally, the brother of all these confiding men who are, if not robbed, at least defrauded by all these pirates.

"It is this strange emotion, Monsieur, that I am obeying at this moment, in writing to you, and in begging of you to address a warning note to the great army of easy-going husbands.

"However, I had still some lingering doubts. This woman was drunk and must be lying.

"I went on to inquire: 'How is it that you never relate these adventures to any one, you women?'

"She gazed at me with profound pity, and with such an air of sincerity that for the moment I thought she had been sobered by astonishment.

"We—— My dear fellow, you are very foolish. Why do we never talk to you about these things? Ha! ha! ha! Does your valet tell you about his tips, his odd sous? Well, these are our little tips. The husband ought not to complain when we don't go any farther. But how stupid you are! . . . And then what harm does it do as long as we don't yield?'

"I again asked her, with much embarrassment:

"'So then you have often been kissed by men?'

"She answered, with an air of sovereign contempt for the man who could have any doubt on the subject:

"'Why, every woman has been often embraced. . . . Try it on with any of them, no matter whom, in order to see for yourself, you great goose! Look here! embrace Madame de X——! She is quite young and very virtuous. Embrace some one, my friend—embrace and touch; you will see, ha! ha! ha!'

* * * * * * *

"All of a sudden she flung her glass straight at the chandelier. The champagne fell down in a shower, extinguishing three wax-candles, stained the hangings, and deluged the table, while the broken glass was scattered about the dining-room. Then she made an effort to seize the bottle to do the same with it, but I prevented her. After that, she began to scream in a shrill voice—the nervous attack had come on, as I had foreseen. . . .

* * * * * * *

"Some days later I had almost forgotten this avowal of a tipsy woman when I chanced to find myself at an evening party with this Madame de X—— whom my sweetheart had advised me to embrace. As I lived in the same neighbourhood as she did, I offered to drive her to her door, for she was alone this evening. She accepted my offer.

"As soon as we were in the carriage, I said to myself: 'Come! I must try it on!' But I had not the courage. I did not know how to make a start, how to begin the attack.

"Then, suddenly, the desperate courage of cowards came to my aid. I said to her: 'How pretty you looked this evening!'

"She replied with a laugh: 'So, then, this evening was an exception, as this is the first time you noticed it.'

"I did not know what rejoinder to make. Certainly my gallantry was not making progress. After a little reflection, however, I managed to say:

"'No, but I never dared to tell you.'

"She was astonished.

"'Why?'

"'Because it is—it is a little difficult.'

"'Difficult to tell a woman that she's pretty? Why, where did you come from? You should always tell us so, even when you only half think it . . . because it always gives us pleasure to hear . . .'

"I felt myself suddenly stirred by a whimsical audacity, and, catching her round the waist, I sought to kiss her.

"However, I must have been very awkward while trying not to be too rough, for she kept turning her head aside so as to avoid contact with my face, saying:

"'Oh, no—this is rather too much—too much. . . . You are too hasty! Take care of my hair. You cannot kiss a woman who has her hair dressed like mine! . . .'

"I resumed my former position in the carriage, disconcerted, unnerved by this repulse. But the carriage drew up before her gate; and as she

stepped out of it, she held out her hand to me, saying in her most gracious tones:

"'Thanks, dear Monsieur, for having seen me home . . . and don't forget my advice!'

"I saw her three days later. She had forgotten everything.

"And I, Monsieur, I am incessantly thinking of the other sort of men—the sort of men to whom a lady's coiffure is no obstacle, and who know how to take advantage of every opportunity."

JOSEPH

THE little Baroness Andrée de la Fraisières and little Comtesse Noémi de Gardens were both of them drunk, quite drunk. They had dined together in the large room facing the sea. The soft breeze of a summer evening blew in at the open window, soft and fresh at the same time, a breeze that smelled of the sea. The two young women, extended in their lounging chairs, sipped their Chartreuse from time to time, as they smoked cigarettes. They were talking most confidentially, telling each other details which nothing but this charming intoxication could have permitted their pretty lips to utter.

Their husbands had returned to Paris that afternoon, and had left them alone on that deserted little sea beach, which they had selected so as to avoid those gallant marauders that are constantly met with in fashionable watering places. As they were absent five days in the week, they objected to country excursions, luncheons on the grass, swimming lessons and those sudden familiarities which spring up in the idle life of watering places. Dieppe, Etretat, Trouville seemed to them places to be avoided, and they had rented a house which had

been built and abandoned by an eccentric individual in the valley of Roqueville, near Fécamp, and there they buried their wives for the whole summer.

The ladies were frankly drunk. Not knowing how to amuse themselves, the little Baroness had suggested a good dinner and champagne. To begin with, they had found great amusement in cooking this dinner themselves, and then they had eaten it merrily, and had drunk freely, in order to allay the thirst which the heat of the fire had excited. Now they were chatting and talking nonsense, while gently gargling their throats with Chartreuse. In fact, they did not in the least know any longer what they were saying.

The Countess, with her feet in the air on the back of a chair, was further gone than her friend.

"To complete an evening like this," she said, "we ought to have a lover apiece. If I had foreseen this some time ago, I would have sent for a couple from Paris, and I would have let you have one. . . ." "I can always find one," the other replied; "I could have one this very evening, if I wished." "What nonsense! At Roqueville, my dear? It would have to be some peasant, then." "No, not altogether." "Well, tell me all about it." "What do you want me to tell you?" "About your lover?" "My dear, I do not want to live without being loved, for I should fancy I was dead if I were not loved." "So should I." "Is not that so?" "Yes. Men cannot understand it! And especially our husbands!" "No, not in the least. How can you expect it to be different? The

love which we want is made up of being spoiled, of gallantries and of pretty words and actions. That is the nourishment of our hearts; it is indispensable to our life, indispensable, indispensable . . ." "Indispensable."

"I must feel that somebody is thinking of me, always, everywhere. When I go to sleep and when I wake up, I must know that somebody loves me somewhere, that I am being dreamed of, longed for. Without that, I should be wretched, wretched! Oh! yes, unhappy enough to do nothing but cry." "I am just the same."

"You must remember that anything else is impossible. When a husband has been nice for six months, or a year, or two years, he necessarily becomes a brute, yes, a regular brute. . . . He does not put himself out for anything, but shows himself just as he is, and makes a scene on the slightest provocation, or without any provocation whatever. One cannot love a man with whom one lives constantly." "That is quite true." "Isn't it? . . . What was I saying? I cannot the least remember?" "You were saying that all husbands are brutes!" "Yes, brutes . . . all of them." "That is quite true." "And then?" "What do you mean?" "What was I saying just then?" "I don't know because you did not say it!" "But I had something to tell you." "Oh! yes, that is true; well? . . ." "Oh! I have got it. . . ." "Well, I am listening." "I was telling you that I can find lovers everywhere." "How do you manage it?" "Like this. Now follow me carefully.

When I get to some fresh place I take notes and make my choice." "You make your choice?" "Yes, of course I do. First of all I take notes. I ask questions. Above all, a man must be discreet, rich, and generous; is not that so?" "It is quite true!" "And then he must please me, as a man." "Of course." "Then I bait the hook for him." "You bait the hook?" "Yes, just as one does to catch fish. Have you never fished with a hook and line?" "No, never." "That is a mistake; it is very amusing, and besides that, it is instructive. Well, then, I bait the hook. . . ." "How do you do it?" "How stupid you are! Does not one catch the man one wants to catch, without their having any choice? And they really think that they choose . . . the fools . . . but it is we who choose . . . always. . . . Just think, when one is not ugly nor stupid, as is the case with us, all men aspire to us, all . . . without exception. We look them over from morning till night, and when we have selected one, we fish for him. . . ." "But that does not tell me how you do it?" "How I do it? . . . Why, I do nothing; I allow myself to be looked at, that is all." "You allow yourself to be looked at? . . ." "Why, yes; that is quite enough. When one has allowed one's self to be looked at several times following, a man immediately thinks you the most lovely, most seductive of women, and then he begins to make love to you. I give him to understand that he is not so bad-looking, without saying anything to him, of course, and he falls in love, like

a log. I have him fast, and it lasts a longer or a shorter time, according to his qualities."

"And do you catch all whom you please, like that?" "Nearly all." "Oh! So there are some who resist?" "Sometimes." "Why?" "Oh! Why? A man is a Joseph for three reasons. Because he is in love with another woman, because he is excessively timid, or because he is . . . how shall I say it? . . . incapable of carrying out the conquest of a woman to the end. . . ." "Oh! my dear! . . . Do you really believe? . . ." "I am sure of it . . . there are many of this latter class, many, many . . . many more than people think. Oh! they look just like everybody else . . . they strut like peacocks. . . . No, when I said peacocks . . . I made a mistake, for they could not display themselves." "Oh! my dear. . . ." "As to the timid, they are sometimes unspeakably stupid. They are the sort of men who ought not to undress themselves, even when they are going to bed alone, when there is a looking-glass in their room. With them, one must be energetic, make use of looks, and squeeze their hands, and even that is useless sometimes. They never know how or where to begin. When one faints in their presence . . . as a last resource . . . they try to bring you round . . . and if you do not recover your senses immediately . . . they go and get assistance.

"Those whom I prefer myself are other women's lovers. I carry them by assault . . . at

. . . at . . . at the point of the bayonet, my dear!" "That is all very well, but when there are no men, as here, for instance?" "I find them." "You find them? But where?" "Everywhere. But that reminds me of my story.

"Now, listen. Just two years ago, my husband made me pass the summer on his estate at Bougrolles. There was nothing there . . . you know what I mean, nothing, nothing, nothing whatever! In the neighbouring country houses there were a few disgusting boors, who cared for nothing but shooting, and who lived in country houses which had not even a bathroom, men who perspire, go to bed covered with perspiration, and whom it would be impossible to improve, because their principles of life are dirty. Now just guess what I did!" "I cannot possibly." "Ha! ha! ha! I had just been reading a number of George Sand's novels which exalt the man of the people, novels in which the workingmen are sublime and all the men of the world are criminals. In addition to this, I had seen *Ruy Blas* the winter before, and it had impressed me very much. Well, one of our farmers had a son, a good-looking young fellow of two and twenty who had studied for a priest, but had left the seminary in disgust. Well, I took him as footman!" "Oh! . . . And then? . . . What afterward?"

"Then . . . then, my dear, I treated him very haughtily, and showed him a good deal of my person. I did not lure this rustic on, I simply enflamed him! . . ." "Oh! Andrée!" "Yes,

and I enjoyed the fun very much. People say that servants count for nothing! Well, he did not count for much. I used to ring to give him his orders every morning while my maid was dressing me, and every evening as well, while she was undressing me." "Oh! Andrée!"

"My dear, he caught fire like a thatched roof. Then, at meals, I used continually to talk about cleanliness, about taking care of one's person, about baths and shower baths, until at the end of a fortnight he bathed in the river morning and night, and used to perfume himself enough to poison the whole château. I was even obliged to forbid him to use perfumes, telling him, with furious looks, that men ought never to use anything but eau de Cologne."

"Oh! Andrée!"

"Then, I took it into my head to get together a library suitable to the country. I sent for a few hundred moral novels, which I lent to all our peasants and all my servants. A few books . . . a few . . . poetical books . . . such as excite the mind of . . . schoolboys and schoolgirls . . . had found their way into my collection . . . and I gave them to my footman. That taught him life . . . a funny sort of life."

"Oh! Andrée!"

"Then I grew familiar with him, and used to say thou to him. I had given him the name of Joseph. And, my dear, he was in a state . . . in a terrible state. . . . He got as thin as . . . as a barn-door cock . . . and rolled

his eyes like an idiot. I was extremely amused; it was one of the most delightful summers I ever spent. . . ." "And then? . . ." "Then? . . . Oh! yes. . . . Well, one day when my husband was away from home, I told him to order the basket phaeton and to drive me into the woods. It was warm, very warm. . . . There!" "Oh! Andrée, do tell me all about it. . . . It is so amusing. . . ." "Here, have a glass of Chartreuse, otherwise I shall empty the decanter myself. Well, I felt ill, on the road." "How?" "You are very stupid. I told him that I was not feeling well, and that he must lay me on the grass, and when I was lying there I told him I was choking, and that he must unlace me. And then, when I was unlaced, I fainted." "Did you go right off?" "Oh! dear, no, not the least." "Well?"

"Well, I was obliged to remain unconscious for nearly an hour, as he could find no means of bringing me round. But I was very patient, and did not open my eyes."

"Oh! Andrée! . . . And what did you say to him?" "I? Nothing at all! How was I to know anything, as I was unconscious? I thanked him, and told him to help me into the carriage, and he drove me back to the château; but he nearly upset us in turning into the gate!" "Oh! Andrée! And is that all? . . ." "That is all. . . ." "You did not faint more than that once?" "Only once, of course! I did not want to take such a fellow for my lover." "Did you keep him long after that?" "Yes, of course. I have him still. Why

should I have sent him away? I had nothing to complain of." "Oh! Andrée! And is he in love with you still?" "Of course he is." "Where is he?"

The little Baroness put out her hand to the wall and touched the electric bell, and the door opened almost immediately, and a tall footman came in who diffused a scent of eau de Cologne all round him. "Joseph," she said to him, "I am afraid I am going to faint; send my lady's maid to me."

The man stood motionless, like a soldier before his officer, and fixed an ardent look on his mistress, who continued: "Go quickly, you great idiot; we are not in the wood to-day, and Rosalie will attend to me better than you would." He turned on his heels and went, and the little Baroness asked nervously: "But what shall you say to your maid?" "I shall tell her what we have been doing! No, I shall merely get her to unlace me; it will relieve my chest, for I can scarcely breathe. I am drunk . . . my dear . . . so drunk that I should fall if I were to get up from my chair."

THE PEDDLER

HOW many fleeting associations, trifling things, chance meetings, humble dramas we have witnessed or guessed at, while our mind is still ignorant and unformed, are, as it were, guiding threads which lead it gradually to a knowledge of sad realities.

As I saunter along idly in my customary walks my mind, abstracted in endless, aimless reverie, constantly recurs to little, long-past incidents, amusing or the reverse, which rise up before me like birds in the brush.

This summer, as I was wandering along a road in Savoy overlooking the right bank of the Lake of Bourget, and as my glance lingered on that mass of water, mirror-like and of a unique shade of pale blue, as it gleamed in the rays of the setting sun, I felt my heart stirred by that emotion which I have felt since childhood for lakes, rivers, the sea.

On the other bank of the immense watery surface rose the high mountain range, its base extending in one direction toward the Rhone, and in the other toward the Bourget, beyond the line of vision, its crest dentated like a cock's comb as far as the last summit of the "Dent du Chat." On either

side of the road grapevines, festooned from tree to tree, smothered with their leaves the slender branches round which they twined, and extended across the landscape in green, yellow, and red garlands, dotted with clusters of black grapes.

The road was deserted, white, and dusty. Suddenly a man emerged from the grove of large trees that incloses the village of Saint-Innocent, and, bending under a load, he came toward me, leaning on a cane.

As he approached I recognized in him one of those peddlers, or wandering merchants, who sell small articles for a trifling amount, and there came to my mind a reminiscence of days long past, a mere nothing, simply an adventure that happened to me between Argenteuil and Paris when I was twenty-five.

All my happiness at that time consisted in boating. I had taken a room at a cheap eating house in Argenteuil, and every evening I took the parliamentary train, that long, slow train that deposits at every station a crowd of men carrying packages. They are heavy and corpulent, as they take no exercise, and their trousers are baggy from continually sitting at an office desk. This train, in which I seemed to get a whiff of the office and of official documents, deposited me at Argenteuil. My boat was waiting for me, ready to skim over the water, and I rowed along rapidly, dining either at Chatou, at Epinay, or at Saint-Ouen. When I got back I put away my boat and started on foot for Paris with the moon shining down on me.

Well, one night on the white road I perceived in front of me a man walking. Oh! I was constantly meeting those night travellers of the Parisian suburbs so much dreaded by belated citizens. This man went on slowly before me with a heavy load on his shoulders.

I came right up to him at a rapid pace, my steps resounding on the road. He stopped and turned round; then, to avoid me, he crossed to the opposite side of the road.

As I rapidly passed him, he called out to me:

"Hullo! good evening, Monsieur."

I responded:

"Good evening, mate."

He went on:

"Are you going far?"

"I am going to Paris."

"You won't be long getting there; you're going at a good pace. As for me, I have too big a load on my shoulders to walk so quickly."

I slackened my pace. Why had this man spoken to me? What was he carrying in this big pack? Vague suspicions of crime sprang up in my mind and made me curious. The columns of the newspapers every morning contain so many accounts of crimes committed in this place, the peninsula of Gennevilliers, that some of them must be true. Such things are not invented merely to amuse readers—all this catalogue of arrests and varied misdeeds with which the reports of the law courts are filled.

However, this man's voice seemed rather timid

than bold, and up to the present his manner had been more cautious than aggressive.

In my turn I began to question him:

"And you, are you going far?"

"Not farther than Asnières."

"Is Asnières your place of abode?"

"Yes, Monsieur, I am a peddler by occupation, and I live at Asnières."

He had left the sidewalk where pedestrians walk beneath the shade of the trees in the daytime and walked in the middle of the road. I did the same. We glanced suspiciously at each other, holding our sticks in our hands. When I was quite close to him I felt perfectly reassured; he apparently shared this feeling, for he asked:

"Would you mind going a little more slowly?"

"Why should I go slowly?"

"Because I don't care for this road by night. I have goods on my back, and two are always better than one. When two men are together people seldom attack them."

I felt that he was right, and that he was afraid. So I yielded to his wishes, and we walked along, side by side, this stranger and I, at one o'clock in the morning, along the road leading from Argenteuil to Asnières.

"Why are you going home so late if it is so dangerous?" I asked my companion.

He told me his history. He had not intended to return home this evening, as he had taken with him that very morning a stock of goods to last him three or four days. But he had been so fortunate

in disposing of them that he found it necessary to return home at once in order to deliver next day a number of things which had been bought on credit.

He explained to me with genuine satisfaction that he was doing very well, having a talent for talking, and that while displaying some trifles while chatting he was able to dispose of many other things that were heavy to carry.

He added:

"I have a shop at Asnières. My wife keeps it."

"Ah! So you're married?"

"Yes, Monsieur, for the last fifteen months. I have a very nice wife. She'll be surprised when she sees me coming home to-night."

He then gave me an account of his marriage. He had been attentive to this girl for two years, but she had taken time to make up her mind.

She had since her childhood kept a little shop at the corner of a street, where she sold all sorts of things—ribbons, flowers in summer, and principally pretty little shoe-buckles, and many other trifles, of which, owing to the kindness of a manufacturer, she made a specialty. She was well known in Asnières as "La Bluette." This name was given to her because she often dressed in blue. And she made money, as she was very clever in everything she did. He did not think she was very well at the present moment, and believed she was *enceinte,* but he was not quite sure. Their business was prospering, and he travelled about exhibiting samples to all the small dealers in the adjoining districts.

He had become a sort of travelling commission agent for some of the manufacturers, working at the same time for them and for himself.

"And you—what is your business?" he said.

I answered hesitatingly. I explained that I had a sailing-boat and two yawls in Argenteuil, that I came for a row every evening, and that, as I was fond of exercise, I sometimes walked back to Paris, where I had a profession, which I led him to infer was a lucrative one.

He remarked:

"Faith, if I had spondulics like you, I wouldn't amuse myself by trudging along the roads like this at night. It isn't safe along here."

He gave me a sidelong glance, and I asked myself whether he might not, after all, be a cunning rascal, who did not want to run any fruitless risk.

Then I felt reassured as he murmured:

"A little less quickly, if you please. This pack of mine is heavy."

The sight of a group of houses showed that we had reached Asnières.

"I am almost at home," he said. "We don't sleep in the shop; it is watched at night by a dog, but a dog who is worth four men. And then it costs too much to live in the centre of the town. But listen to me, Monsieur! You have rendered me a great service, for I don't feel my mind at ease when I'm travelling with my pack along the roads. So now you must come in with me and drink a glass of mulled wine with my wife if she hasn't gone to bed, for she is a sound sleeper and doesn't like to

be waked up. Besides, I'm not a bit afraid without my pack, and so I'll see you to the gates of the city with a cudgel in my hand."

I declined the invitation; he insisted on my coming in; I still held back; he pressed me with so much earnestness and evident sincerity and regret at my refusal, for he expressed himself well, asking me if I would not take a drink with him because of his occupation, that I at last yielded, and followed him along a lonely road to one of those large dilapidated houses that one sees on the outskirts of suburbs.

Arrived at the door, I hesitated. This great plaster barrack looked like a thieves' resort, like a den of highway robbers. But he made me take the lead as he pushed open a door. He guided me with his hands on my shoulders, through profound darkness, toward a stairway where I had to feel my way with my hands and feet, with a well-grounded apprehension of tumbling into some gaping cellar.

When I had reached the first landing he said to me: "Go on up! It's on the sixth story."

I searched my pockets, and, finding there a box of candle matches, I lighted the way up the ascent. He followed me, puffing beneath his pack, as he repeated:

"It's high up! It's high up!"

When we were at the top of the house he drew forth a key attached to the inside of his coat by a string, and, unlocking the door, he made me enter.

It was a little whitewashed room, with a table in

the centre, six chairs, and a kitchen-cupboard close to the wall.

"I am going to wake up my wife," he said; "then I am going down to the cellar to fetch some wine; it doesn't keep up here."

He went over to one of the two doors which opened out of this apartment, and called:

"Bluette! Bluette!" Bluette did not reply. He called out in a louder tone: "Bluette! Bluette!"

Then, knocking at the partition with his fist, he growled: "Will you wake up, in God's name?"

He waited, put his ear to the keyhole, and muttered, in a calmer tone: "Pooh! if she is asleep, she must be allowed to sleep! I'll go and get the wine; wait a couple of minutes for me."

He disappeared. I sat down and made the best of it.

What had I come to this place for? All of a sudden I gave a start, for I heard people talking in low tones, and moving about quietly, almost noiselessly, in the room where the wife slept.

The devil! I must have fallen into a trap! How was it she did not wake, this Bluette, at all the noise her husband made? Perhaps it was only a signal to say to his accomplices: "There's a mouse in the trap. I'll watch the door; you attend to the rest." I could hear them more distinctly; they were turning the key in the lock. My heart beat rapidly. I retreated to the other end of the room, saying to myself: "Well, I must defend myself!" and, seizing a chair, I prepared for an energetic struggle.

The door opened slightly, and a hand appeared

holding it ajar; then a head, the head of a man wearing a hard felt hat, was pushed through the half-open door, and I saw two eyes looking at me. Then, so quickly that I had not time to think of defending myself, the individual, the supposed criminal, a big young fellow, with bare feet and his clothes just thrown on him, without a tie, his shoes in his hand, a handsome fellow, truly, almost a gentleman, sprang toward the entrance door and disappeared down the stairway.

I sat down again. This was becoming interesting. I waited for the husband, who was a long time getting the wine. At length I heard him coming upstairs, and the sound of his steps made me laugh, one of those solitary laughs which one cannot restrain.

He came into the room, bringing two bottles, and he asked:

"Is my wife still asleep? You have not heard her moving about?"

I suspected that she had her ear to the door, and I said:

"No, I have heard nothing."

And now he again called out:

"Pauline!"

She made no reply, and did not even move.

He came back to me, and explained:

"You see, she doesn't like me to come home at night and take a drop with a friend."

"So you think she is not asleep?"

"Of course she is not asleep." He seemed annoyed.

"Well, at any rate," he said, "let us have a drink together."

And he at once showed a disposition to empty the two bottles, one after the other, without more ado.

This time I did display some energy. When I had swallowed one glass I rose up to leave. He no longer spoke of accompanying me, and, glancing toward the wife's door with a sullen scowl, the scowl of a common man in an angry mood, the scowl of a brute whose violence is only slumbering, he muttered:

"She'll have to open that door when you are gone."

I stared at this poltroon, who had worked himself into a fit of rage without knowing why, perhaps owing to an obscure presentiment, the instinct of the deceived male who does not like closed doors. He had talked about her to me in a tender strain; now assuredly he was going to beat her.

He exclaimed, as he shook the lock once more:

"Pauline!"

A voice like that of a woman waking out of her sleep replied from behind the partition:

"Eh! What?"

"Didn't you hear me come in?"

"No, I was asleep! Let me rest."

"Open the door!"

"Yes, when you're alone. I don't like you to be bringing home fellows at night to drink with you."

Then I took myself off, stumbling down the stairs, just as the other man had done, whose ac-

complice I was. And, as I resumed my journey toward Paris? I realized that I had just witnessed in this wretched abode a scene of the eternal drama which is being enacted every day, in every form, and in every class, and in every hemisphere.

A PHILOSOPHER

I HAD no secrets from Blérot, who had been my intimate friend from childhood. We were united heart and soul, like brothers, and were mutual confidants of each other's love affairs.

When he told me that he was going to get married I felt hurt, as if he had been guilty of treachery toward me. I felt that it must interfere with that cordial and absolute affection which had united us hitherto. His wife would come between us. The intimacy of marriage establishes a kind of complicity of mysterious alliance between two persons, even when they have ceased to love each other. Man and wife are like two discreet partners who will not let any one else into their secrets. But that close bond which the conjugal kiss rivets is widely loosened on the day on which the woman takes a lover.

I remember Blérot's wedding as if it were but yesterday. I would not be present at the signing of the marriage contract, as I have no particular liking for such ceremonies, but I only went to the civil wedding and to the church.

His wife, whom I had never seen before, was a

tall, slight girl, with pale hair, pale cheeks, pale hands, and eyes to match. She walked with a slightly undulating motion, as if she were on board a ship, and seemed to advance with a succession of long, graceful courtesies.

Blérot seemed very much in love with her. He looked at her constantly, and I felt a shiver of immoderate desire for her pass through my frame.

I went to see him a few days after the wedding, and he said to me:

"You do not know how happy I am; I am madly in love with her; but then she is . . . she is. . . ." He did not finish his sentence, but he put the tips of his fingers to his lips with a gesture which signified:

"Divine! delicious! perfect!" and a good deal more besides.

I asked, laughing: "What! All that?"

"Everything that you can imagine," was his answer.

He introduced me to her. She was very pleasant, on easy terms with me, as was natural, and begged me to look upon their house as my own. I felt that he, Blérot, did not belong to me any longer. Our intimacy was altogether checked, and we hardly found a word to say to each other.

I soon took my leave, and shortly afterward went to the East, and returned by way of Russia, Germany, Sweden, and Holland, after an absence of eighteen months from Paris.

The morning after my arrival, as I was walking along the boulevards to breathe the air of my

native city once more, I saw a pale man with sunken cheeks coming toward me, who was as much like Blérot as it was possible for a physically emaciated man to be to a strong, ruddy, rather stout man. I looked at him in surprise, and asked myself: "Can it possibly be he?" But he saw me, and came toward me with outstretched arms, and we embraced in the middle of the boulevard.

After we had gone up and down once or twice from the Rue Drouot to the Vaudeville Theatre, as we were taking leave of each other, I said to him:

"You don't look at all well. Are you ill?"

"I do feel rather out of sorts," was all he said.

He looked like a man who was going to die, and I felt a flood of affection for my old friend, the only real friend I had ever had. I squeezed his hands.

"What is the matter with you? Are you in pain?"

"A little tired; but it is nothing."

"What does your doctor say?"

"He calls it anæmia, and has ordered me to eat no white meat and to take tincture of iron."

A suspicion flashed across me.

"Are you happy?" I asked him.

"Yes, very happy; my wife is charming, and I love her more than ever."

But I noticed that he grew rather red and seemed embarrassed, as if he were afraid of any further questions, so I took him by the arm and pushed him into a café, which was nearly empty at

that time of day. I forced him to sit down, and, looking him straight in the face, I said:

"Look here, old fellow, just tell me the exact truth."

"I have nothing to tell you," he stammered.

"That is not true," I replied firmly. "You are ill, mentally perhaps, and you dare not reveal your secret to any one. Something or other is injuring your health, and I mean you to tell me what it is. Come, now, I am waiting for you to begin."

Again he got very red, stammered, and, turning his head away, said:

"It is very idiotic—but I—I am done for!"

As he did not go on, I said:

"Just tell me what it is."

"Well, it is my wife—that is all," he said abruptly, almost desperately.

I did not understand at first. "Does she make you unhappy? How? What is it?"

"No," he replied, in a low voice, as if he were confessing some crime; "I love her too much, that is all."

I was thunderstruck at this brutal avowal, and then I felt inclined to laugh, but at length managed to reply:

"But surely, at least so it seems to me, you might manage to—to love her a little less."

He had grown very pale again, and at length made up his mind to speak to me frankly, as he used to do formerly.

"No," he said, "that is impossible; and I am

dying from it, I know; it is killing me, and I am really frightened. Some days, like to-day, I feel inclined to leave her, to go away altogether, to start for the other end of the world, so as to live for a long time; and then, when the evening comes, I return home in spite of myself, but slowly, and feeling uncomfortable. I go upstairs hesitatingly and ring, and when I go in I see her there sitting in her easy-chair, and she says: 'How late you are!' I kiss her, and we sit down to dinner. During the meal I think to myself: 'I will go directly it is over, and take the train for somewhere, no matter where;' but when we get back to the drawing-room I am so tired that I have not the courage to get up out of my chair, and so I remain, and then—and then—I succumb again."

I could not help smiling again. He saw it, and said: "You may laugh, but I assure you it is very horrible."

"Why don't you tell your wife?" I asked him. "Unless she be a regular monster she would understand."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is all very well for you to talk. I don't tell her because I know her nature. Have you ever heard it said of certain women, 'She has just married a third time'? Well, that makes you laugh as you did just now, and yet it is true. What is to be done? It is neither her fault nor mine. She is so because nature has made her so; I assure you, my dear old friend, she has the temperament of a Messalina. She does not know it, but I do; so much the worse for me. She

seems like an ignorant schoolgirl, and she really is ignorant, poor child.

"Every day I form energetic resolutions, for you must understand that I am dying. But one look of her eyes, one of those looks in which I can read the ardent desire of her lips, is enough for me, and I succumb at once, saying to myself: 'This is really the end; I will have no more of her death-giving kisses,' and then, when I have yielded again, as I have to-day, I go out and walk on ahead, thinking of death, and saying to myself that I am lost, that all is over.

"I am so mentally ill that I went for a walk to Père Lachaise cemetery yesterday. I looked at all the graves, standing in a row like dominoes, and thought to myself: 'I shall soon be here,' and then I returned home, quite determined to pretend to be ill, and so escape, but I could not.

"Oh! You don't know what it is. Ask a smoker who is poisoning himself with nicotine whether he can give up his delicious and deadly habit. He will tell you that he has tried a hundred times without success, and he will, perhaps, add: 'More's the pity, but I had rather die than go without tobacco.' That is just the case with me. When once one is in the clutches of such a passion or such a vice, one gives one's self up to it entirely."

He got up and gave me his hand. I was seized with a tumult of rage, and with hatred for this woman, this careless, charming, terrible woman; and as Blérot was buttoning up his coat to go out I said to him, brutally perhaps:

"But, in God's name, why don't you let her have a lover, rather than kill yourself like that?"

He shrugged his shoulders without replying, and went off.

For six months I did not see him. Every morning I expected a letter of invitation to his funeral, but would not go to his house from a complicated feeling of contempt for him and for that woman, a feeling of anger, indignation, of a thousand sensations.

One lovely spring morning I was walking in the Champs Elysées. It was one of those warm days which make our eyes bright and stir in us a tumultuous feeling of happiness from the mere sense of existence. Some one tapped me on the shoulder, and, turning round, I saw my old friend, looking well, stout, and rosy.

He gave me both hands, beaming with pleasure, and exclaimed:

"Here you are, you erratic individual!"

I looked at him, utterly thunderstruck.

"Well, on my word—yes. By Jove! I congratulate you; you have indeed changed in the last six months!"

He flushed scarlet, and said, with an embarrassed laugh:

"One can but do one's best."

I looked at him so persistently that he evidently felt uncomfortable, and I went on:

"So—now—you are—completely cured?"

He stammered, hastily:

"Yes, perfectly, thank you." Then, changing

his tone: "How lucky that I should have come across you, old fellow! I hope we shall often meet now."

But I would not give up my idea; I wanted to know how matters really stood, and I asked:

"Don't you remember what you told me six months ago? I suppose—I—eh—suppose you control yourself now?"

"Please don't talk any more about it," he replied uneasily; "forget that I mentioned it to you. But I have no intention of letting you go; you must come and dine at my house."

A sudden fancy took me to see for myself how matters stood, so that I might understand all about it, and I accepted.

His wife received me in a most charming manner, and she was, in fact, a most attractive woman. Her long hands and her neck and cheeks were beautifully white and delicate, and marked her breeding, and her walk was undulating and delightful.

René gave her a brotherly kiss on the forehead and said:

"Has not Lucien come yet?"

"Not yet," she replied, in a clear, soft voice; "you know he is almost always rather late."

At that moment the bell rang, and a tall man was shown in. He was dark, with a thick beard, and looked like a modern Hercules. We were introduced; his name was Lucien Delabarre.

René and he shook hands in a most friendly manner, and then we went to dinner.

It was a most enjoyable meal, without the least constraint. My old friend spoke with me constantly, in the old familiar, cordial manner, just as he used to do. It was: "You know, old fellow!" "I say, old fellow!" "Just listen a moment, old fellow!" Suddenly he exclaimed:

"You don't know how glad I am to see you again; it takes me back to old times."

I looked at his wife and the other man. Their attitude was perfectly correct, though I fancied once or twice that they exchanged a rapid and furtive glance.

As soon as dinner was over René turned to his wife, and said:

"My dear, I have just met Pierre again, and I am going to carry him off for a walk and a chat along the boulevards to remind us of old times. I am leaving you in very good company."

The young woman smiled, and said to me, as she shook hands with me:

"Don't keep him too long."

As we went along, arm in arm, I could not help saying to him, for I was determined to know how matters stood:

"I say, what has happened? Do tell me!"

He, however, interrupted me roughly, and answered like a man who has been disturbed without any reason:

"Just look here, old fellow; let a man alone with your questions."

Then he added, half aloud, as if talking to himself:

"After all, it would have been too stupid to have let one's self go to pot like that."

I did not press him. We walked on quickly and began to talk. All of a sudden he whispered in my ear:

"I say, suppose we go and have a bottle of 'fizz' with some girls! Eh?"

I could not prevent myself from laughing heartily.

"Just as you like; come along, let us go."

WHAT WAS REALLY THE MATTER WITH ANDREW

THE lawyer's house looked on to the square. Behind it there was a well-kept garden, with a back entrance into a narrow street which was almost always deserted, and from which it was separated by a wall.

At the bottom of that garden Maître Moreau's wife had promised, for the first time, to meet Captain Sommerive, who had been making love to her for a long time.

Her husband had gone to Paris for a week, so she was quite free for the time being. The Captain had begged so hard, and had used such loving words; she was certain that he loved her ardently, and she felt so isolated, so misunderstood, so neglected amid all the law business which seemed to be her husband's sole pleasure, that she had given away her heart without even asking herself whether it would give her anything else at some future time.

Then, after some months of platonic love, of pressing of hands, of kisses rapidly stolen behind a door, the Captain had declared that he would ask permission to exchange, and leave the town immediately, if she would not grant him a meeting, a real meeting, during her husband's absence; and so at length she yielded to his importunity.

Just then she was waiting, close against the wall, with a beating heart, trembling at the slightest sound, and when at length she heard somebody climbing up the wall, she very nearly ran away.

Suppose it were not he, but a thief? But no; some one called out softly, "Matilda!" and when she replied, "Etienne!" a man jumped on to the path with a crash.

It was he—and what a kiss!

For a long time they remained in each other's arms. But suddenly a fine rain began to fall, and the drops from the leaves fell on her neck and made her start. Whereupon he said:

"Matilda, my adored one, my darling, my angel, let us go indoors. It is twelve o'clock; we can have nothing to fear."

"No, dearest; I am too frightened."

But he held her in his arms, and whispered:

"Your servants sleep on the third floor, looking on to the square, and your room, on the first, looks on to the garden, so nobody can hear us. I love you so that I wish to love you entirely, from head to foot." And he kissed her fervently.

She resisted still, frightened and even ashamed. But he put his arms round her, lifted her up, and carried her out of the rain, which was by this time descending in torrents.

The door was open; they groped their way upstairs, and when they were in the room he bolted the door while she lit a match.

Then she fell, half fainting, into a chair, while he knelt down beside her.

At last she said, panting:

"No! no! Etienne, please let me remain a virtuous woman. This is so horrid, so common. Cannot we love each other with a spiritual love only? . . . Oh! Etienne!"

But he was beyond reasoning with, and she got up and tried to escape him, by hiding behind the curtains of the bedstead. As he hastily followed her his belt, which was loose, slipped off and his sword fell to the floor with a crash.

A prolonged, shrill infant's cry came from the next room, the door of which had remained open.

"You have awakened the child," she whispered, "and perhaps he will not go to sleep again."

He was only fifteen months old, and slept in a room opening out of hers, so that she might be able to hear him.

The Captain exclaimed ardently:

"What does it matter, Matilda? How I love you! Come to me, Matilda."

But she struggled, and resisted in her fright.

"No! no! Just listen how he is crying; he will wake up the nurse, and what should we do if she were to come? We should be lost. Just listen to me, Etienne. When he screams at night his father always takes him into our bed, and he is quiet immediately; it is the only means of keeping him still. Do let me take him. . . ."

The child roared, uttered shrill screams, which pierced the thickest walls, so as to be heard by passers-by in the streets.

In his consternation, Etienne allowed her to go

and get the child, which she brought in and placed on the bed, when he was quiet at once.

Etienne sat astride on a chair and made a cigarette, and in about five minutes Andrew went to sleep again.

"I will take him back," his mother said; and she took him back very carefully to his bed.

When she returned, the Captain was waiting for her with open arms, and put his arms round her in a transport of love, while she said, stammering:

"Oh! Etienne, my darling, if you only knew how I love you; how . . ."

Andrew began to cry again, and he, in a rage, exclaimed:

"Confound it all, won't the little brute be quiet?"

No, the little brute would not be quiet, but, on the contrary, howled all the louder.

Matilda thought she heard a noise downstairs; no doubt the nurse was coming, so she jumped up and took the child into bed, and he grew quiet directly.

Three times she put him back, and three times she had to fetch him again, and an hour before daybreak the Captain had to go, swearing like the proverbial trooper; and, to calm his impatience, Matilda said he might come again the next night.

Of course he came, more impatient and ardent than ever, excited by the delay.

He took care to put his sword carefully into a corner; he took off his boots like a thief, and spoke so low that Matilda could hardly hear him. But just as he thought all was quiet a cry, feeble at

first, but which grew louder every moment, made itself heard. Andrew was awake again.

He uttered little spasmodic wails, and there was not the slightest doubt that if he went on like that the whole house would awake; so his mother, not knowing what to do, went and brought him in. The Captain was more furious than ever, but did not move, and very carefully he put out his hand, took a small piece of the child's skin between his two fingers, no matter where it was, the thighs or elsewhere, and pinched it. The little one struggled and screamed in a deafening manner, but his tormentor pinched everywhere furiously and more vigorously. He took a morsel of flesh and twisted and turned it, and then let go in order to take hold of another piece, and then another and another.

The child screamed like a chicken that is having its throat cut, or a dog that is being mercilessly beaten. His mother caressed him, kissed him, and tried to stifle his cries by her tenderness; but Andrew grew purple, as if he were going into convulsions, and kicked and struggled with his little arms and legs in an alarming manner.

The Captain said softly:

"Try and take him back to his cradle; perhaps he will be quiet."

And Matilda went into the other room with the child in her arms.

As soon as he was out of his mother's bed he cried less loudly, and when he was in his own he was quiet, with the exception of a few broken sobs.

The rest of the night was tranquil.

The next night Etienne came again. As he happened to speak rather loudly, Andrew awoke again and began to scream. His mother went and fetched him immediately, but the Captain pinched so hard and long that the child was nearly suffocated by its cries, and its eyes turned in its head and it foamed at the mouth; as soon as it was back in its cradle it was quiet, and in four days Andrew did not cry any more to come into his mother's bed.

On Saturday evening the lawyer returned and took his place again at the domestic hearth.

As he was tired with his journey he went to bed early; but he had not long lain down when he said to his wife:

"Why, how is it that Andrew is not crying? Just go and fetch him, Matilda; I like to feel that he is between us."

She got up and brought the child, but as soon as he saw that he was in that bed, in which he had been so fond of sleeping a few days previously, he wriggled and screamed so violently in his fright that she had to take him back to his cradle.

M. Moreau could not get over his surprise. "What a very funny thing! What is the matter with him this evening? I suppose he is sleepy?"

"He has been like that all the time that you were away; I have never been able to have him in bed with me once."

In the morning the child woke up and began to laugh and play with his toys.

The lawyer, who was an affectionate man, got up, kissed his offspring, and took him into his arms

to carry him to their bed. Andrew laughed, with the vacant laugh of little creatures whose ideas are still vague. He suddenly saw the bed and his mother in it, and his happy little face puckered up, till suddenly he began to scream furiously, and struggled as if he were going to be put to the torture.

In his astonishment his father said:

"There must be something the matter with the child," and mechanically he lifted up his little night-shirt.

He uttered a prolonged "O—o—h!" of astonishment. The child's calves, thighs, and legs were covered with blue spots as big as halfpennies.

"Just look, Matilda!" the father exclaimed; "this is horrible!" And the mother rushed forward in a fright. It was horrible; no doubt the beginning of some sort of leprosy, of one of those strange affections of the skin which doctors are often at a loss to account for.

The parents looked at one another in consternation.

"We must send for the doctor," the father said.

But Matilda, pale as death, was looking at her child, who was spotted like a leopard. Then, suddenly uttering a violent cry as if she had seen something that filled her with horror, she exclaimed:

"Oh! the wretch!"

In his astonishment M. Moreau asked: "What are you talking about? What wretch?"

She got red up to the roots of her hair, and stammered:

"Oh, nothing! but I think I can guess—it must be—we ought to send for the doctor . . . it must be that wretch of a nurse who has been pinching the poor child to make him keep quiet when he cries."

In his rage the lawyer sent for the nurse, and very nearly beat her. She denied it most impudently, but was instantly dismissed, and the Municipality having been informed of her conduct, she will find it a hard matter to get another situation.

CHRISTMAS EVE

A CHRISTMAS-EVE supper! No, never again!" said Henri Templier, in a furious tone, as if some one had suggested his participation in some crime. The others laughed and said:

"Why do you fly into a rage?"

"Because a Christmas-eve supper played me the dirtiest trick in the world, and ever since I have felt an insurmountable horror for that night of imbecile gayety."

"Tell us about it!"

"You want to know what it was? Very well, then; just listen.

"You remember how cold it was two years ago at Christmas; cold enough to kill people in the streets. The Seine was covered with ice; the pavements froze one's feet through the soles of one's boots, and the whole world seemed to be about to come to an end.

"I had a big piece of work on, and so I refused every invitation to supper, as I preferred to spend the night at my writing table. I dined alone and then began to work. But about ten o'clock I grew restless at the thought of the gay and busy life all

over Paris, at the noise in the streets which reached me in spite of everything, at the sound of my neighbours' preparations for supper, which I heard through the walls. I hardly knew any longer what I was doing ; I wrote nonsense, and at last came to the conclusion that I had better give up all hope of producing any good work that night.

"I walked up and down my room; I sat down and got up again. I was certainly under the mysterious influences of the merriment outside, and I resigned myself to it. I rang for my servant and said to her:

"'Angela, go and get a good supper for two; some oysters, a cold partridge, some crayfish, ham, and some cakes. Put out two bottles of champagne, lay the cloth, and go to bed.'

"She obeyed in some surprise, and when all was ready I put on my greatcoat and went out. A great question was to be solved: 'Whom was I going to bring in to supper?' My female friends had all been invited elsewhere, and if I had wished to invite one, I ought to have seen about it beforehand, so, thinking that I would do a good action, I said to myself:

"'Paris is full of poor and pretty girls who will have nothing on their table to-night, and who are on the look-out for some generous fellow. I will act the part of Providence to one of them this evening; and I will find one if I have to go into every pleasure resort and have to question them and hunt till I find one to my choice.' And I started off on my search.

"I certainly found many poor girls who were on the look-out for some adventure, but they were ugly enough to give any man a fit of indigestion, or thin enough to freeze on the spot if they had stood still. You all know that I have a weakness for stout women; the more embonpoint they have, the better I like them, and a female colossus would drive me out of my senses with delight.

"Suddenly, opposite the Théâtre des Variétés, I saw a profile to my liking. A good head and a full figure. I was charmed, and said:

"'By Jove! What a fine girl!'

"It only remained for me to see her face. A woman's face is the dessert, while the rest is . . . the roast.

"I hastened on and overtook her, and turned round suddenly under a gas lamp. She was charming, quite young, dark, with large black eyes, and I immediately invited her to supper. She accepted without any hesitation, and a quarter of an hour later we were sitting at supper in my lodgings. 'Oh, how comfortable it is here!' she said as she came in, and she looked about her with evident satisfaction at having found a supper and a room on that bitter night. She was superb, so beautiful that she astonished me, and her figure fairly captivated me.

"She took off her cloak and hat, sat down, and began to eat; but she seemed in low spirits, and sometimes her pale face twitched as if she were suffering from some hidden sorrow.

"'Have you anything troubling you?' I asked.

"'Bah! Don't let us think of troubles!'

"And she began to drink. She emptied her champagne glass at a draught, filled it again, and emptied it again, without stopping, and soon a little colour came into her cheeks, and she began to laugh.

"I adored her already, kissed her continually, and discovered that she was neither stupid, nor common, nor coarse as some ordinary girls are. I asked her for some details of her life, but she replied:

"'My little fellow, that is no business of yours!' Alas! an hour later. . . .

"At last it was time to go to bed, and while I was clearing the table, which had been laid in front of the fire, she undressed herself quickly, and got in. My neighbours were making a terrible din, singing and laughing like lunatics, and so I said to myself:

"'I was quite right to go out and bring in this girl; I should never have been able to do any work.'

"At that moment, however, a deep groan made me look round, and I said:

"'What is the matter with you, my dear?'

"She did not reply, but continued to utter painful sighs, as if she were suffering horribly, and I continued:

"'Do you feel ill?' And suddenly she uttered a cry, a heartrending cry, and I rushed up to the bed, with a candle in my hand.

"Her face was distorted with pain, and she was

wringing her hands, panting and uttering long, deep groans, which sounded like a rattle in the throat, and which are so painful to hear, and I asked her in consternation:

"'What is the matter with you? Do tell me what is the matter.'

"'Oh! my stomach! my stomach!' she said. I pulled up the bedclothes, and I saw. . . . My friends, she was in labour.

"Then I lost my head, and I ran and knocked at the wall with my fists, shouting: 'Help! help!'

"My door was opened almost immediately, and a crowd of people came in, men in evening dress, women in low necks, harlequins, Turks, musketeers, and this inroad startled me so that I could not explain myself, and they, who had thought that some accident had happened, or that a crime had been committed, could not understand what was the matter. At last, however, I managed to say:

"'This . . . this . . . woman . . . is being confined.'

"Then they looked at her and gave their opinion, and a friar, especially, declared that he knew all about it, and wished to assist nature, but as they were all as drunk as pigs, I was afraid that they would kill her, and I rushed downstairs without my hat, to fetch an old doctor who lived in the next street. When I came back with him the whole house was up; the gas on the stairs has been relighted, the lodgers from every floor were in my room, while four boatmen were finishing my champagne and lobsters.

"As soon as they saw me they raised a loud shout, and a milkmaid presented me with a horrible little wrinkled specimen of humanity, that was mewing like a cat, and said to me:

"'It is a girl.'

"The doctor examined the woman, declared that she was in a dangerous state, as the event had occurred immediately after supper, and he took his leave, saying he would immediately send a sick nurse and a wet nurse, and an hour later the two women came, bringing all that was requisite with them.

"I spent the night in my armchair, too distracted to be able to think of the consequences, and almost as soon as it was light, the doctor came again, who found his patient very ill, and said to me:

"'Your wife, Monsieur. . . .'

"'She is not my wife,' I interrupted him.

"'Very well, then, your mistress; it does not matter to me.'

"He told me what must be done for her, what her diet must be, and then wrote a prescription.

"What was I to do? Could I send the poor creature to the hospital? I should have been looked upon as a brute in the house and in all the neighbourhood, and so I kept her in my rooms, and she had my bed for six weeks.

"I sent the child to some peasants at Poissy to be taken care of, and she still costs me fifty francs a month, for as I had paid at first, I shall be obliged to go on paying as long as I live, and later on she will believe that I am her father. But, to crown

my misfortunes, when the girl had recovered . . . I found that she was in love with me, madly in love with me, the baggage!"

"Well?"

"Well, she had grown as thin as a homeless cat, and I turned the skeleton out of doors, but she watches for me in the streets, hides herself, so that she may see me pass, stops me in the evening when I go out, in order to kiss my hand, and, in fact, worries me enough to drive me mad; and that is why I never keep Christmas eve now."

WORDS OF LOVE

"Sunday.

I NEVER see you, you do not write to me, you never come, so I must suppose that you have ceased to love me. But why? What have I done? Pray tell me, my own dear love. I love you so much, so dearly! I should like always to have you near me, to kiss you all day while I called you every tender name that I could think of. I adore you, I adore you, I adore you, my beautiful cock. Your affectionate hen, SOPHIE."

"Monday.

"MY DEAR FRIEND: You will absolutely understand nothing of what I am going to say to you, but that does not matter, and if my letter happens to be read by another woman, it may be profitable to her.

"Had you been deaf and dumb, I should no doubt have loved you for a very long time, and the cause of that which has happened is that you can talk; that is all.

"In love, you see, dreams are always songs, but in order that they may be so, they must not be interrupted; and when one talks between two kisses,

one always interrupts that frenzied dream which our souls indulge in, unless one utters sublime words; and sublime words do not come out of the little mouths of pretty girls.

"You do not understand me at all, do you? So much the better, and I will go on. You are certainly one of the most charming and adorable women whom I have ever seen.

"Are there any eyes on earth that contain more dreams than yours, more unknown promises, greater depths of love? I do not think so. And when that mouth of yours, with its two round lips, smiles, and shows the glittering white teeth, one is tempted to say that there issues from this ravishing mouth ineffable music, something inexpressibly delicate, a sweetness which makes us sob.

"Then you call me your 'beloved big rabbit,' and then it seems to me as though I had suddenly found an entrance into your thoughts, that I can see your soul—that little soul of a pretty little creature—yes, pretty, but—and that is what troubles me, don't you see, troubles me more than tongue can tell. I would much prefer never to see you at all.

"You go on pretending not to understand anything, do you not? I counted on that.

"Do you remember the first time you came to see me at my residence? How gayly you stepped inside, an odour of violets, which clung to your dress, heralding your entrance; how we looked at each other, for ever so long, without uttering a word, after which we embraced like two fools . . .

then . . . then, from that time to this, we have never exchanged a word.

"But when we separated did not our trembling hands and our eyes say many things, things . . . which cannot be expressed in any language. At least, I thought so; and when you went away, you murmured:

"'We shall meet again soon!'

"That was all you said, and you will never guess what delightful dreams you left me, all that I, as it were, caught a glimpse of, all that I fancied I could guess in your thoughts.

"You see, my poor child, for men who are not stupid, who are rather refined and somewhat superior, love is such a complicated instrument that the merest trifle puts it out of order. You women never perceive the ridiculous side of certain things when you love, and you fail to see the grotesqueness of some expressions.

"Why does a word which sounds quite right in the mouth of a small, dark woman seem quite wrong and funny in the mouth of a fat, light-haired woman? Why are the wheedling ways of the one altogether out of place in the other?

"Why is it that certain caresses which are delightful from the one should be wearisome from the other? Why? Because in everything, and especially in love, perfect harmony, absolute agreement in motion, voice, words, and in demonstrations of tenderness, are necessary, according to age, height, the colour of the hair, and the style of beauty.

"If a woman of thirty-five, who has arrived at

the age of violent, tempestuous passion, were to preserve the slightest traces of the caressing archness of her love affairs at twenty, were not to understand that she ought to express herself differently, look at her lover differently and kiss him differently, were not to see that she ought to be a Dido and not a Juliette, she would infallibly disgust nine lovers out of ten, even if they could not account to themselves for their estrangement. Do you understand me? No. I hoped so.

"From the time that you turned on your tap of tenderness, it was all over for me, my dear friend. Sometimes we would embrace for five minutes, in one interminable kiss, one of those kisses which make lovers close their eyes, as if part of it would escape through their looks, as if to preserve it entire in that clouded soul which it is ravaging. And then, when our lips separated, you would say to me:

"'That was nice, you fat old dog.'

"At such moments I could have beaten you; for you gave me successively all the names of animals and vegetables which you doubtless found in some cookery book or gardener's manual. But that is nothing.

"The caresses of love are brutal, bestial, and if one comes to think of it, grotesque! . . . Oh! My poor child, what joking elf, what perverse sprite could have prompted the concluding words of your letters to me? I have made a collection of them, but out of love for you I will not show them to you.

"And you really sometimes said things which

were quite inopportune, and you managed now and then to let out an exalted *I love you!* on such singular occasions that I was obliged to restrain a strong desire to laugh. There are times when the words *I love you!* are so out of place that they become indecent; let me tell you that.

"But you do not understand me, and many other women will also not understand me and think me stupid, though that matters very little to me. Hungry men eat like gluttons, but people of refinement are often disgusted and feel an invincible dislike for a dish on account of a mere trifle. It is the same with love as it is with cookery.

"What I cannot comprehend, for example, is that certain women who fully understand the irresistible attraction of fine embroidered stockings, the exquisite charm of shades, the witchery of valuable lace concealed in the depths of their underclothing, the exciting zest of hidden luxury, and all the subtle delicacies of female elegance, never understand the invincible disgust with which words that are out of place, or foolishly tender, inspire us.

"At times coarse and brutal expressions work wonders, as they excite the senses and make the heart beat, and they are allowable at the hours of combat.

"Nothing shocks us that comes at the right time; but then, we must also know when to hold our tongue and to avoid phrases *à la Paul de Kock* at certain moments.

"And I embrace you passionately on the condition that you say nothing, RENE."

THE SUBSTITUTE

MADAME BONDEROI?"

"Yes, Madame Bonderoi."

"Impossible."

"I tell you it is."

"Madame Bonderoi, the old lady in a lace cap, the devout, pious, honourable Madame Bonderoi, whose little false curls looked as if they were glued to her head."

"That is the very woman."

"Oh! Come, you must be mad."

"I swear to you that it is Madame Bonderoi."

"Then please give me the details."

"Here they are. During the life of Monsieur Bonderoi, the lawyer, people said that she utilized his clerks for her own particular service. She is one of those respectable middle-class women, with secret vices and inflexible principles, of whom there are so many. She liked good-looking young fellows, and I should like to know what is more natural than that? Do not we all like pretty girls?

"As soon as old Bonderoi was dead his widow began to live the peaceful and irreproachable life of a woman with a fair, fixed income. She went to church assiduously, and spoke evil of her neigh-

bours, but gave no handle to any one to speak ill of her, and when she grew old she became the little wizened, sour-faced, mischievous woman whom you know. Well, this adventure, which you would scarcely believe, happened last Friday.

"My friend, Jean d'Anglemare, is, as you know, a captain in a dragoon regiment, and is quartered in the barracks in the Rue de la Rivette, and when he got to his quarters the other morning he found that two men of his squadron had had a terrible quarrel. The rules of military honour are very strict, and so they fought a duel. After the duel they became reconciled, and when their officer questioned them they told him what their quarrel had been about. They had fought on Madame Bonderoi's account."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, about Madame Bonderoi.

"But I will let Trooper Siballe speak:

"'This is how it was, Captain. About a year and a half ago I was lounging about the barrack-yard, between six and seven o'clock in the evening, when a woman came up and spoke to me, and said, just as if she had been asking her way: "Soldier, would you like to earn ten francs a week, honestly?" Of course, I told her that I decidedly should, and so she said: "Come and see me at twelve o'clock tomorrow morning. I am Madame Bonderoi, and my address is No. 6, Rue de la Tranchée." "You may rely upon my being there, Madame." And as she went away, looking very pleased, she added: "I am very much obliged to you, soldier." "I am

obliged to you, Madame," I replied. But I plagued my head about the matter until the time came, all the same.

"'At twelve o'clock exactly I rang the bell, and she let me in herself. She had a lot of ribbons on her head.

"'"We must make haste," she said; "as my servant might come in."

"'"I am quite willing to make haste," I replied, "but what am I to do?"

"'She only laughed, and replied: "Don't you understand, you great, knowing fellow?"

"'I was no nearer her meaning, I give you my word of honour, Captain, but she came and sat down by me, and said:

"'"If you mention this to any one I will have you put in prison, so swear that you will never open your lips about it."

"'I swore whatever she liked, though I did not at all understand what she meant, and my forehead was covered with perspiration; so I took my pocket-handkerchief out of my helmet, and she took it and wiped my brow with it; then she kissed me, and whispered: "Then you will?" "I will do anything you like, Madame," I replied, "as that is what I came for."

"'Then she made herself clearly understood by her actions, and when I saw what she meant, I put my helmet on a chair and showed her that in the dragoons a man never retires, Captain.

"'Not that I cared much about it, for she was certainly not in her prime, but it is no good being

too particular in such a matter, as ten francs are scarce, and then I have relations whom I like to help, and I said to myself: "There will be five francs for my father out of that."

"'When I had done my allotted task, Captain, I got ready to go, though she wanted me to stay longer, but I said to her:

"'"To every one their due, Madame. A small glass of brandy costs two sous, and two glasses cost four."

"'She understood my meaning and put a gold ten-franc piece into my hand. I do not like that coin, because it is so small that if your pockets are not very well made, and come at all unsewn, one is apt to find it in one's boots, or not to find it at all; and so, while I was looking at it, she was looking at me. She got red in the face, as she had misunderstood my looks, and she said: "Is not that enough?"

"'"I did not mean that, Madame," I replied; "but if it is all the same to you, I would rather have two five-franc pieces." And she gave them to me, and I took my leave. This has been going on for a year and a half, Captain. I go every Tuesday evening, when you give me leave to go out of barracks; she prefers that arrangement, as her servant has gone to bed then, but last week I was not well, and I had to go into the infirmary. When Tuesday came I could not get out, and I was very much annoyed, because of the ten francs which I had been receiving every week, and I said to myself:

"'"If anybody goes there I shall be done for;

and she will be sure to take an artilleryman," and the idea made me very angry. So I sent for Paumelle, who comes from my part of the country, and I told him how matters stood:

"'"There will be five francs for you, and five for me," I said. He agreed, and went, as I had given him full instructions. She opened the door as soon as he knocked and let him in, and as she did not look at his face, she did not perceive that it was not I, for, you know, Captain, one dragoon is very like another, with their helmets on.

"'Suddenly, however, she noticed the change, and she asked angrily: "What are you? What do you want? I do not know you."

"'Then Paumelle explained matters; he told her that I was not well, and that I had sent him as my substitute; so she looked at him, made him also swear to keep the matter secret, and then she accepted him, as you may suppose, for Paumelle is not a bad-looking fellow, either. But when he came back, Captain, he would not give me my five francs. If they had been for myself I should not have said a word, but they were for my father, and on that score I would stand no nonsense, and I said to him:

"'"You are not particular in what you do, for a dragoon; you are a discredit to your uniform."

"'He raised his fist, Captain, saying that fatigue duty like that was worth double. Of course, everybody has his own ideas, and he ought not to have accepted it. You know the rest.'

"Captain d'Anglemar laughed until he cried as he told me the story, but he also made me promise

to keep the matter a secret, just as he had promised the two soldiers. So, above all, do not betray me, but promise me to keep it to yourself."

"Oh! You may be quite easy about that. But how was it all arranged, in the end?"

"How? It is a joke in a thousand! . . . Mother Bonderoi keeps her two dragoons, and reserves his own particular day for each of them, and in that way everybody is satisfied."

"Oh! That is capital! Really capital."

"And he can send his old father and mother the money as usual, and thus morality is satisfied."

THE CAKE

WE will call her Madame Anserre, though it was not her real name.

She was one of those Parisian comets who leave, as it were, a trail of light behind them. She wrote verses and novels; she had a poetic heart, and was ravishingly beautiful. She opened her doors to very few—only to exceptional people, those with the title of "Prince."

To have the *entrée* of her house stamped one as a person of intelligence, and it was an honour much appreciated.

Her husband played the part of an obscure satellite. It is not easy to be the husband of a star. This husband had, however, an original idea, that of creating a state within a state, of possessing some value in himself, a secondary value, possibly; but still, in this way, when his wife held receptions he also held a reception on his own account. He had his special set who appreciated him, listened to him, and bestowed more attention on him than they did on his brilliant partner.

He had devoted himself to agriculture—to agriculture in the Chamber. There are in the same way generals in the Chamber—those who are born, who

live, and who die on the round leather chairs of the War Office are all of this sort, are they not?—sailors in the Chamber—viz., in the Admiralty—colonizers in the Chamber, etc., etc. So he had studied agriculture; indeed, he had studied it deeply, in its relation to the other sciences, with political economy, with the fine arts—we call everything art, even the horrible railway bridges are "works of art." At length he reached the point when it was said of him: "He is a man of ability." He was quoted in the technical reviews; his wife had succeeded in getting him appointed a member of a committee at the Ministry of Agriculture.

This modest glory was quite sufficient for him.

Under pretext of diminishing expenses he invited his friends for the same day his wife received hers, so that they mixed together, or, rather, they did not—they formed two groups. Madame, with her escort of artists, academicians, and Ministers, occupied a kind of hall, furnished and decorated in the style of the Empire. Monsieur generally withdrew with his agriculturists into a smaller portion of the house used as a smoking-room and ironically described by Madame Anserre as the Salon of Agriculture.

The two camps were distinctly separate. Monsieur would sometimes venture into the Academy, and cordial handshakings were exchanged, but the Academy entertained infinite contempt for the Salon of Agriculture, and it was rarely that one of the princes of science, of thought, or of anything else, mingled with the agriculturists.

These receptions occasioned little expense—a cup of tea, a cake, that was all. Monsieur, at an earlier period, had claimed two cakes, one for the Academy and one for the agriculturists, but, Madame having rightly suggested that this way of acting seemed to indicate two camps, two receptions, two parties, Monsieur did not press the matter, so that they had only one cake, of which Madame Anserre did the honours at the Academy, and which then passed into the Salon of Agriculture.

Now, this cake was soon, for the Academy, a subject of observation well calculated to arouse curiosity. Madame Anserre never cut it herself. That function always fell to the lot of one or other of the illustrious guests. The particular duty, which was supposed to carry with it honourable distinction, was performed by each person for a pretty long period, in one case for three months, scarcely ever for more; and it was noticed that the privilege of "cutting the cake" carried with it a heap of other marks of superiority—a sort of royalty, or, rather, very accentuated vice-royalty.

The reigning cutter spoke in a haughty tone, with an air of marked command; and all the favours of the mistress of the house were for him alone.

These happy individuals were in moments of intimacy described in hushed tones behind doors as the "favourites of the cake," and every change of favourite introduced into the Academy a sort of revolution. The knife was a sceptre, the pastry an emblem; the chosen ones were congratulated. The agriculturists never cut the cake. Monsieur him-

self was always excluded, although he ate his share.

The cake was cut in succession by poets, by painters, and by novelists. A great musician had the privilege of measuring the portions of the cake for some time; an ambassador succeeded him. Sometimes a man less well known, but elegant and sought after, one of those who are called, according to the different epochs, "true gentleman," or "perfect knight," or "dandy," or something else, seated himself, in his turn, before the symbolic cake. Each of them, during his ephemeral reign, exhibited greater consideration toward the husband; then, when the hour of his fall had arrived, he passed on the knife toward the other, and mingled once more with the crowd of followers and admirers of the "beautiful Madame Anserre."

This state of things lasted a long time, but comets do not always shine with the same brilliance. Everything gets worn out in society. One would have said that gradually the eagerness of the cutters grew feebler; they seemed to hesitate at times when the tray was held out to them; this office, once so much coveted, became less and less desired. It was retained for a shorter time; they appeared to be less proud of it.

Madame Anserre was prodigal of smiles and civilities. Alas! no one was found any longer to cut it voluntarily. The newcomers seemed to decline the honour. The "old favourites" reappeared one by one like dethroned princes who have been replaced in power for a brief spell. Then, the chosen ones became few, very few. For a month

(oh, wonder!) M. Anserre cut the cake; then he looked as if he were getting tired of it; and one evening Madame Anserre, the beautiful Madame Anserre, was seen cutting it herself. But this appeared to be very wearisome to her, and next day she urged one of her guests so strongly to do it that he did not dare to refuse.

The symbol was too well known, however; the guests stared at one another with scared, anxious faces. To cut the cake was nothing, but the privileges to which this favour had always given a claim now frightened people; therefore, the moment the dish made its appearance the academicians rushed pell-mell into the Salon of Agriculture, as if to shelter themselves behind the husband, who was perpetually smiling. And when Madame Anserre, in a state of anxiety, presented herself at the door with a cake in one hand and the knife in the other, they all seemed to form a circle around her husband as if to appeal to him for protection.

Some years passed. Nobody cut the cake now; but, yielding to an inveterate habit, the lady who had always been gallantly called "the beautiful Madame Anserre" looked out each evening for some devotee to take the knife, and each time the same movement took place around her, a general flight, skillfully arranged, and full of combined and clever manœuvres to avoid the offer that was rising to her lips.

But, one evening, a young man presented himself at her reception—an innocent, unsophisticated youth. He knew nothing about the mystery of the

cake; accordingly, when it appeared, and when all the rest ran away, when Madame Anserre took from the man-servant's hands the dish and the pastry, he remained quietly by her side.

She thought that, perhaps, he knew about the matter; she smiled and, in a tone which showed some emotion, said:

"Will you be kind enough, dear Monsieur, to cut this cake?"

He displayed the utmost readiness, and took off his gloves, flattered at such an honour being conferred on him.

"Oh, to be sure, Madame, with the greatest pleasure."

Some distance away in the doorway leading to the Salon of Agriculturists were faces full of amazement looking on. Then, when the spectators saw the newcomer cutting without any hesitation, they quickly came forward.

An old poet jocosely slapped the neophyte on the shoulder.

"Bravo, young man!" he whispered in his ear.

The others gazed at him with curiosity. Even the husband appeared to be surprised. As for the young man, he was astonished at the consideration which they suddenly seemed to show toward him; above all, he failed to comprehend the marked attentions, the manifest favour, and the species of mute gratitude which the mistress of the house bestowed on him.

It appears, however, that he eventually found out.

At what moment, in what place, was the revela-

tion made to him? Nobody could tell; but when he again presented himself at the reception he had a preoccupied air, almost a shamefaced look, and he cast around him a glance of uneasiness.

The bell rang for tea. The man-servant appeared. Madame Anserre, with a smile, seized the dish, casting a look about her for her young friend; but he had fled so precipitately that no trace of him could be seen any longer. Then she went looking everywhere for him, and ere long she discovered him in the Salon of the Agriculturists. With his arm locked in that of the husband, he was earnestly consulting that gentleman as to the best method of destroying phylloxera.

"My dear Monsieur," she said to him, "will you be so kind as to cut this cake for me?"

He reddened to the roots of his hair, and, hanging down his head, stammered out some excuses. Thereupon M. Anserre took pity on him, and, turning toward his wife, said:

"My dear, you might have the goodness not to disturb us. We are talking about agriculture. Let Baptiste cut your cake."

And since that day nobody has ever cut Madame Anserre's cake.

THE AWAKENING

SHE had not left the Val de Ciré, where her husband owned two cotton mills, in all the three years she had been married. She had no children, but, although she led a quiet life, was quite happy in her home among the trees, called the château by the mill operatives.

Monsieur Vasseur, though considerably older than she was, was very kind to her. She loved him, and no untrue thought had ever entered her mind.

Her mother came and spent every summer at Ciré, and then returned to Paris for the winter, as soon as the leaves began to fall.

Jeanne had a slight cough every autumn, for the narrow valley through which the river wound became foggy for five months. First of all, there would be slight mists over the meadows, making all the low ground look like a large pond, above which the roofs of the houses appeared.

This white vapour, which rose like a tide, soon enveloped everything, and turned the valley into a land of phantoms, where men moved about like ghosts, unable to recognize each other ten yards off, and the trees, dripping with moisture, rose up through the mist.

But the people who passed along the neighbour-

ing hills and looked down upon the deep, white depression of the valley saw the two huge chimneys of Monsieur Vasseur's factories rising above the mist below. Day and night they vomited forth two long streams of black smoke, and that alone indicated that people were living in that hollow, which looked as if it were filled with a cloud of cotton.

That year, when October came, the medical men advised the young woman to go and spend the winter in Paris with her mother, as the air of the valley was dangerous for her weak chest, and she went. For a month or so she thought continually of the home which she had left, to which she was attached, and whose well-known furniture and quiet ways she loved so much, but by degrees she became accustomed to her new life, and enjoyed entertainments, dinner and evening parties, and balls.

Till then she had retained her girlish manners; she had been undecided and rather inert; she walked languidly, and had a tired smile, but now she became animated and merry, and was always ready for amusement. Men paid her marked attention, and she was amused at their talk and made fun of their gallantries, as she felt sure that she could resist them, for she was rather disgusted with what is called love, from what she had learned of it in marriage.

The idea of giving up her body to the coarse caresses of such bearded creatures made her laugh with pity, and shudder a little with ignorance.

She asked herself how women could consent to those degrading contacts with strangers, as they

were already obliged to endure them with their legitimate husbands. She would have loved her husband much more if they had lived together like two friends and had restricted themselves to chaste kisses, which are the caresses of the soul.

But she was much amused by their compliments, by the desire which showed itself in their eyes, and which she did not reciprocate, by their declarations of love, which they whispered into her ear as they were returning to the drawing-room after some grand dinner, by their words, which were murmured so low that she almost had to guess them, and which left her blood quite cool and her heart untouched, while they gratified her unconscious coquetry, while they kindled a flame of pleasure within her that brought a smile to her lips, made her eyes glow, and her woman's heart, to which homage was due, quiver with delight.

She was fond of those *tête-à-têtes* when it was getting dusk, when a man grows persistent, stammers, trembles, and falls on his knees. It was a delicious and new pleasure to her to know that they felt that passion which left her quite unmoved, to say no, by a shake of the head, and with her lips; to withdraw her hands, to get up and calmly ring for lights, and to see the man who had been trembling at her feet get up, confused and furious, when he heard the footman coming.

She often gave a hard laugh, which froze the most burning words, and said sharp things, which fell like a jet of icy water on the most ardent protestations, while the intonations of her voice were

enough to make any man who really loved her kill himself. There were two especially who made obstinate love to her, although they did not at all resemble one another.

One of them, Paul Péronel, was a tall man of the world, gallant and enterprising, a man who was accustomed to successful love affairs, and who knew how to wait and when to improve his opportunity.

The other, Monsieur d'Avancelle, trembled when he approached her, scarcely ventured to express his love, but followed her like a shadow and gave utterance to his hopeless desire by distracted looks and the assiduity of his attentions, while she made him a kind of slave who followed her steps, and whom she treated as if he had been her servant.

She would have been much amused if anybody had told her that she would love him, and yet she did love him after a singular fashion. As she saw him continually she had grown accustomed to his voice, to his gestures, and to his manner, as one grows accustomed to those whom one meets continually. His face frequently haunted her dreams, and she saw him as he really was—gentle, delicate in all his actions, humble, but passionately in love—and she awoke full of those dreams, fancying that she still heard him and felt him near her, until one night (most likely she was feverish) she saw herself alone with him in a small wood, where they were both sitting on the grass. He was saying tender things to her, while he pressed and kissed her hands.

She could feel the warmth of his skin and of his breath, and she was stroking his hair in a very natural manner.

We are quite different in our dreams to what we are in real life. She felt full of love for him, full of calm and deep love, and was happy in stroking his forehead and in having him near her. Gradually he put his arms round her, kissed her eyes and her cheeks without her attempting to get away from him, and their lips met. . . .

When she saw him again, though he was unconscious of the agitation that he had caused her, she felt that she was blushing, and while he was telling her of his love she was continually recalling to mind her dream, without being able to get rid of the recollection.

She loved him, loved him with refined tenderness, which arose chiefly from the remembrance of her dream, although she dreaded its realization.

At last he perceived her embarrassment, and then she told him everything, even to the dread of his kisses, and she made him swear that he would respect her, and he did so. They spent long hours of ideal love together, during which their souls were in harmony.

Sometimes their lips met, but she felt that she could not resist the infatuation much longer, and as she did not wish to dishonour herself, she wrote and told her husband that she wanted to come to him, and to return to her tranquil, solitary life. He wrote her a very kind letter in reply, and strongly advised her not to return in the middle of the win-

ter and expose herself to a sudden change of climate and to the icy mists of the valley. She was astonished and angry with that confiding man, who did not guess, who did not understand, the struggles of her heart.

February was a warm, bright month, and, although she now avoided being alone with Monsieur Avancelle, she sometimes accepted his invitation to drive round the lake in the Bois de Boulogne with him in the twilight.

On one of these evenings it was so warm that it seemed as if the sap in every tree and plant was rising. Their cab was going at a walk; it was growing dusk, and they were sitting close together, holding each other's hands, and she said to herself:

"It is all over, I am lost!" for she felt the awakening of her desires, the imperious need of that supreme emotion which she had experienced in her dream. Every moment their lips sought each other, clung together and separated, only to meet again immediately.

He did not venture to go into the house with her, but left her at the door, more in love with him than ever, and half fainting.

Monsieur Paul Péronel was waiting for her in the little drawing-room without a light, and when he shook hands with her he felt how feverish she was. He began to talk in a low, tender voice, soothing her weary mind with the charm of tender words.

She listened to him without replying, for she was thinking of the other; she thought she was listening to the other, and thought she felt him leaning

against her, in a kind of hallucination. She saw only Avancelle, and did not remember that any other man existed on earth, and when her ears trembled at those three syllables: "I love you," it was he, the other man, who uttered them, who kissed her hands, who strained her to his breast, as he had done shortly before in the cab. It was he who pressed victorious kisses on her lips, it was his lips, it was he whom she held in her arms and embraced, whom she was calling to, with all the longings of her heart, with all the overwrought emotion of her being.

The next day she returned to Val de Ciré, and her husband, who had not expected her for some time, blamed her for her whim.

"I could not live away from you any longer," she said.

He found her altered in character and sadder than formerly, but when he said to her:

"What is the matter with you? You seem unhappy. What do you want?" she replied:

"Nothing. Happiness exists only in our dreams in this world."

Avancelle came to see her the next summer, and she received him without any emotion, and without regret, for she suddenly perceived that she had never loved him, except in a dream, from which Paul Péronel had brutally roused her.

But the young man, who still adored her, thought as he returned to Paris:

"Women are really very strange, complicated, and inexplicable beings."

AN ADVENTURE IN PARIS

IS there any feeling stronger than curiosity in a woman? Imagine seeing, knowing, touching what one has dreamed about! What would a woman not do for that? When once her eager curiosity is roused, she will be guilty of any folly, commit any imprudence, venture upon anything, and recoil from nothing. I am speaking of women who are really women, who are endowed with that three-layered disposition which appears to be reasonable and cold on the surface, but whose three secret compartments are filled: the first with female restlessness, which is always in a state of flutter; the next with sly tricks which are coloured in imitation of good faith with those sophistical and formidable tricks of apparently devout women, and the last with all those charming, improper acts, with that delightful deceit, exquisite perfidy, and all those wayward qualities which drive lovers who are stupidly credulous to suicide, but which delight others.

The woman whose adventure I am about to relate was a little person from the provinces, who had been insipidly chaste till then. Her life, which was apparently so calm, was spent at home, with a busy

husband and two children, whom she brought up like an irreproachable woman. But her heart beat with unsatisfied curiosity and some unknown longing. She was continually thinking of Paris, and read the fashionable papers eagerly. The accounts of parties, of the dresses and various entertainments, excited her longing; but, above all, she was strangely agitated by those paragraphs which were full of double meaning, by that veil which was half raised by clever phrases, and which gave her a glimpse of culpable and ravishing delights, and from her country home she saw Paris in the apotheosis of magnificent and corrupt luxury.

And during the long nights, when she dreamed, lulled by the regular snoring of her husband, who was sleeping on his back by her side, with a silk handkerchief tied round his head, she saw in her sleep those well-known men whose names appeared on the first page of the newspapers as great stars in a dark sky. She pictured to herself their life of continual excitement, of constant debauches, of orgies such as were indulged in in ancient Rome, which were horribly voluptuous, with refinements of sensuality which were so complicated that she could not even picture them to herself.

The boulevards seemed to her to be a kind of abyss of human passions, and there could be no doubt that the houses there concealed mysteries of prodigious love. But she felt that she was growing old, and this without having known life, except in those regular, horribly monotonous, everyday occupations which constitute the happiness of the home.

She was still pretty, for she was well preserved in her tranquil existence, like some winter fruit in a closed cupboard; but she was agitated and devoured by her secret ardour. She used to ask herself whether she should die without having experienced any of those damning, intoxicating joys, without having plunged once, just once, into that flood of Parisian voluptuousness.

By dint of much perseverance she paved the way for a journey to Paris, found a pretext, got some relations to invite her, and as her husband could not go with her, she went alone, and as soon as she arrived she invented a reason for remaining for two days, or, rather, for two nights, if necessary, as she told him that she had met some friends who lived a little way out of town.

And then she set out on a voyage of discovery. She went up and down the boulevards, without seeing anything except roving and numbered vice. She looked into the larger cafés, and read the "agony column" of the *Figaro,* which every morning seemed to her like a tocsin, a summons to love. But nothing put her on the track of those orgies of actors and actresses; nothing revealed to her those temples of debauchery which she imagined opened at some magic word, like the cave in the *Arabian Nights,* or those catacombs in Rome where the mysteries of a persecuted religion were secretly celebrated.

Her relations, who were quite middle-class people, could not introduce her to any of those well-known men with whose names her head was full,

and in despair she was thinking of returning when chance came to her aid. One day, as she was going along the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, she stopped to look into a shop full of that coloured Japanese bric-à-brac which strikes the eye on account of its colour. She was looking at the little ivory clowns, the tall vases of flaming enamel, and the curious bronzes, when she heard the shopkeeper dilating, with many bows, on the value of an enormous, pot-bellied, comical figure, which was quite unique, he said, to a little, bald-headed, gray-bearded man.

Every moment the shopkeeper repeated his customer's name, which was a celebrated one, in a voice like a trumpet. The other customers, young women and well-dresed gentlemen, gave a swift and furtive, but respectful, glance at the celebrated writer, who was looking admiringly at the china figure. They were both equally ugly, as ugly as two brothers who had sprung from the same mother.

"I will let you have it for a thousand francs, Monsieur Varin, and that is exactly what it cost me. I should ask anybody else fifteen hundred, but I think a great deal of literary and artistic customers, and have special prices for them. They all come to me, Monsieur Varin. Yesterday Monsieur Busnach bought a large, antique goblet of me, and the other day I sold two candelabra like this (is it not handsome?) to Monsieur Alexander Dumas. If Monsieur Zola were to see that Japanese figure he would buy it immediately, Monsieur Varin."

The author hesitated in perplexity, as he wanted to have the figure, but the price was above him, and he thought no more about her looking at him than if he had been alone in the desert. She came in trembling, with her eyes fixed boldly upon him, and she did not even ask herself whether he were good-looking, elegant, or young. It was Jean Varin himself, Jean Varin. After a long struggle and painful hesitation, he put the figure down on the table. "No, it is too dear," he said. The shopkeeper's eloquence redoubled. "Oh! Monsieur Varin, too dear? It is worth two thousand francs, if it is worth a sou." But the man of letters replied sadly, still looking at the figure with the enamelled eyes: "I do not say it is not, but it is too dear for me." And thereupon, seized by a kind of mad audacity, she came forward and said: "What will you charge me for the figure?" The shopkeeper, in surprise, replied: "Fifteen hundred francs, Madame." "I will take it."

The writer, who had not even noticed her till that moment, turned round suddenly; he looked at her from head to foot, with half-closed eyes, observantly, and then he took in the details, as a connoisseur. She was charming, suddenly animated by that flame which had hitherto been dormant in her. And then, a woman who gives fifteen hundred francs for a piece of bric-à-brac is not to be met with every day.

She appeared overcome by a feeling of delightful delicacy, and, turning to him, she said in a trembling voice: "Excuse me, Monsieur; no doubt I

have been rather hasty, as, perhaps, you had not finally made up your mind." He, however, only bowed, and said: "Indeed, I had, Madame." And she, filled with emotion, continued: "Well, Monsieur, if either to-day, or at any other time, you change your mind, you can have this Japanese figure. I only bought it because you seemed to like it."

He was visibly flattered, and smiled: "I should much like to find out how you know who I am?" he said. Then she told him how she admired him, and became quite eloquent as she quoted his works, and while they were talking he rested his arms on a table and fixed his bright eyes upon her, trying to make out who and what she really was. But the shopkeeper, who was pleased to have that living puff of his goods, called out, from the other end of the shop: "Just look at this, Monsieur Varin; is it not beautiful?"

And then every one looked round, and she almost trembled with pleasure at being seen talking so intimately with such a well-known man.

At last, however, intoxicated, as it were, by her feelings, she grew bold, as a general does who is going to give the order for an assault. "Monsieur," she said, "will you do me a great, a very great pleasure? Allow me to offer you this funny Japanese figure as a keepsake from a woman who admires you passionately, and whom you have seen for ten minutes."

Of course he refused and she persisted, but still he resisted her offer, at which he was much amused,

and at which he laughed heartily; but that only made her more obstinate, and she said: "Very well, then, I shall take it to your house immediately; where do you live?"

He refused to give her his address, but she got it from the shopkeeper, and when she had paid for her purchase she ran out to take a cab. The writer went after her, as he did not wish to accept a present for which he could not possibly account. He reached her just as she was jumping into the vehicle, and, getting in after her, he almost fell over her, and then tumbled on to the bottom of the cab as it started. He picked himself up, however, and sat down by her side, feeling very much annoyed.

It was no good for him to insist and to beg her; she showed herself obstinate, and when they got to the door, she stated her conditions: "I will undertake not to leave this with you," she said, "if you will promise to do all I want to-day." And the whole affair seemed so funny to him that he agreed. "What do you generally do at this time?" she asked him; and after hesitating for a few moments, he replied: "I generally go for a walk." "Very well, then; we will go to the Bois de Boulogne!" she said, in a resolute voice, and they started.

He was obliged to tell her the names of all the well-known women, pure or impure, with every detail about them; their life, their habits, their private affairs, and their vices; and when it was getting dusk, she said to him: "What do you do every day at this time?" "I take some absinthe," he replied, with a laugh. "Very well, then, Monsieur,"

she went on, seriously; "let us go and have some absinthe."

They went into a large café on the boulevard, which he frequented, and where he met some of his colleagues, whom he introduced to her. She was half mad with pleasure, and kept saying to herself:

"At last! At last!" But time went on, and she observed that she supposed it must be about his dinner-time, and suggested that they should go and dine. When they left Bignon's, after dinner, she wanted to know what he did in the evening, and, looking at her fixedly, he replied: "That depends; sometimes I go to the theatre." "Very well, then, Monsieur; let us go to the theatre."

They went to the Vaudeville with an order, thanks to him, and, to her great pride, the whole house saw her sitting by his side, in the first balcony boxes.

When the play was over he gallantly kissed her hand, and said: "It only remains for me to thank you for this delightful day. . . ." But she interrupted him: "What do you do at this time every night?" "Why . . . why . . . I go home." She began to laugh, a little, tremulous laugh. "Very well, Monsieur . . . let us go to your rooms."

They did not say anything more. She shivered occasionally, from head to foot, feeling inclined to stay and inclined to run away, but with a fixed determination, after all, to see it out to the end. She was so excited that she had to hold on to the rail-

ing as she went upstairs, and he came up behind her, with a wax match in his hand.

As soon as they were in the room she undressed herself quickly and retired without saying a word, and then she waited for him, cowering against the wall. But she was as simple as it was possible for a provincial lawyer's wife to be, and he was more exacting than a pasha with three tails, and so they did not at all understand each other. At last, however, he went to sleep, and the night passed, and the silence was only disturbed by the tick-tack of the clock, and she, lying motionless, thought of her conjugal nights; and by the light of the Chinese lantern she looked, nearly heartbroken, at the little fat man lying on his back, whose round stomach raised up the bedclothes like a balloon filled with gas. He snored with the noise of a wheezy organ pipe, with prolonged snorts and comic chokings. His few hairs profited by his sleep to stand up in a very strange way, as if they were tired of having been fastened for so long to that pate, whose bareness they were trying to cover, and a small stream of saliva was running out of one corner of his half-open mouth.

At last the daylight appeared through the drawn blinds; so she got up and dressed herself without making any noise, and she had already half opened the door when she made the lock creak, and he woke up and rubbed his eyes. It was some moments before he quite came to himself, and then, when he remembered all that had happened, he said: "What! Are you going already?" She

remained standing, in some confusion, and then she said, in a hesitating voice: "Yes, of course; it is morning. . . ."

Then he sat up, and said: "Look here, I have something to ask you, in my turn." And as she did not reply, he went on: "You have surprised me most confoundedly since yesterday. Be open, and tell me why you did it all, for upon my word I cannot understand it in the least." She went close up to him, blushing as if she had been a virgin, and said: "I wanted to know . . . what . . . what vice . . . really was . . . and . . . well . . . well, it is not at all funny."

And she ran out of the room and downstairs into the street.

A number of sweepers were busy in the streets, brushing the pavements, the roadway, and sweeping everything on one side. With the same regular motion, the motion of mowers in a meadow, they pushed the mud in front of them in a semicircle, and she met them in every street, like dancing puppets, walking automatically with their swaying motion. And it seemed to her as if something had been swept out of her; as if her overexcited dreams had been pushed into the gutter or into the drain, and so she went home, out of breath and very cold, and all that she could remember was the sensation of the motion of those brooms sweeping the streets of Paris in the early morning.

As soon as she got into her room she threw herself onto her bed, and cried.

THE BED

ONE hot afternoon last summer the auctioneer was knocking down the various articles in a listless manner in the large auction rooms, the occupants of which seemed half asleep. In a back room, on the first floor, two or three lots of old silk ecclesiastical vestments were lying in a corner.

There were copes for solemn occasions, and graceful chasubles on which embroidered flowers surrounded symbolic letters on a ground which had become cream-coloured, although it had originally been white. Some second-hand dealers were there, two or three men with dirty beards, and a large woman with a big stomach, one of those women who deal in second-hand finery, and who also manage illicit love affairs, who are brokers in old and young human flesh, just as much as they are in new and old clothes.

Presently a beautiful Louis XV chasuble was put up for sale. It was as pretty as the dress of a marchioness of that period and had retained all its colours. It was embroidered with lilies of the valley round the cross, and long blue iris, which came up to the foot of the sacred emblem, and wreaths

of roses in the corners. When I had bought it I noticed that there was a faint fragrance about it, as if it were permeated with the odour of incense, or, rather, as if it were still pervaded by those delicate, sweet scents of bygone years which seemed to be only the memory of perfumes, the soil of evaporated essences.

When I got it home I wished to have a small chair of the same period covered with it; and as I was handling it in order to take the necessary measures, I felt some paper beneath my fingers, and on cutting the lining, some letters fell at my feet. They were yellow with age, and the faint ink was the colour of rust, and outside the sheet, which was folded in the fashion of years long past, it was addressed in a delicate hand:

"To Monsieur l'Abbé d'Argence."

The first two letters merely assigned places of meeting, but here is the third:

"My Friend: I am very unwell, ill in fact, and I cannot leave my bed. The rain is beating against my windows, and I lie dreaming comfortably and warmly under my eiderdown coverlet. I have a book of which I am very fond, and which seems as if it really applied to me. Shall I tell you what it is? No, for you would only scold me. Then, when I have read a little, I begin to think, and will tell you what about.

"Having been in bed for three days, I think about my bed, and even in my sleep I meditate on it still, and I have come to the conclusion that the bed constitutes our whole life; for we were born in it, we live in it, and we shall die in it. If, therefore, I had Monsieur de Crébillon's pen, I should write the history of a bed, and what exciting and terrible as well as delightful, moving occurrences would not such a book contain! What lessons and what subjects

for moralizing could one not draw from it, for every one?

"You know my bed, my friend, but you will never guess how many things I have discovered in it within the last three days, and how much more I love it in consequence. It seems to me to be inhabited, haunted, if I may say so, by a number of people I never thought of, who, nevertheless, have left something of themselves in that couch.

"Ah! I cannot understand people who buy new beds, beds to which no memories or cares are attached. Mine, ours, which is so shabby and so spacious, must have held many existences in it, from birth to the grave. Think of that, my friend; think of it all; review all those lives, a great part of which was spent between these four posts, surrounded by these hangings embroidered by human fingers, which have seen so many things. What have they seen during the three centuries since they were first put up?

"Here is a young woman lying in this bed.

"From time to time she sighs, and then she groans and cries out; her mother is with her, and presently a little creature that makes a noise like a cat mewing, and which is all shrivelled and wrinkled, comes from her. It is a male child to which she has given birth, and the young mother feels happy in spite of her pain; she is nearly suffocated with joy at that first cry, and stretches out her arms, and those around her shed tears of pleasure; for that little morsel of humanity which has come from her means the continuation of the family, the perpetuation of the blood, of the heart, and of the soul of the old people, who are looking on, trembling with excitement.

"And then, here are two lovers, who for the first time are flesh to flesh together in that tabernacle of life. They tremble; but, transported with delight, they have the delicious sensation of being close together, and by degrees their lips meet. That divine kiss makes them one, that kiss which speaks of human delights, which continually promises them, announces them, and precedes them. And their bed is agitated like the tempestuous sea, and it bends and murmurs, and itself seems to become animated and joyous, for the maddening mystery of love is being accomplished on it. What is there sweeter, what more perfect in this world than those embraces, which make one single being out of two, and which give to both of them at the same moment the same thought, the same expecta-

tion, and the same maddening pleasure, which descends upon them like a celestial and devouring fire?

"Do you remember those lines from some old poet which you read to me last year? I do not remember who wrote them, but it may have been Ronsard:

"'When you and I in bed shall lie,
Lascivious we shall be,
Enlaced, playing a thousand tricks,
Of lovers, gamesomely.'

"I should like to have that verse embroidered on the top of my bed, where Pyramus and Thisbe are continually looking at me out of their tapestry eyes.

"And think of death, my friend, of all those who have breathed out their last sigh to God in this bed. For it is also the tomb of hopes ended, the door which closes everything, after having been the one which lets in the world. What cries, what anguish, what sufferings, what groans, how many arms stretched out toward the past; what appeals to happiness that has vanished for ever, what convulsions, what death-rattles, what gaping lips and distorted eyes, have there not been in this bed, from which I am writing to you, during the three centuries that it has sheltered human beings!

"The bed, you must remember, is the symbol of life; I have discovered this within the last three days. There is nothing good except the bed, and are not some of our best moments spent in sleep?

"But then, again, we suffer in bed! It is the refuge of those who are ill and suffering; a place of repose and comfort for worn-out bodies, and, in a word, the bed is part and parcel of humanity.

"Many other thoughts have struck me, but I have no time to note them down for you, and then, should I remember them all? Besides that, I am so tired that I mean to retire to my pillows, stretch myself out at full length, and sleep a little. But be sure and come to see me at three o'clock to-morrow; perhaps I may be better, and able to prove it to you.

"Good-by, my friend; here are my hands for you to kiss, and I also offer you my lips."

THE RIVAL PINS

"AH! my dear fellow, what jades women are!"

"What makes you say that?"

"Because they have played me an abominable trick."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"Women, or a woman?"

"Two women."

"Two women at once?"

"Yes."

"What was the trick?"

The two young men were sitting outside a café on the boulevards drinking liqueurs mixed with water, those beverages which look like infusions of all the colours in a box of paints. They were nearly the same age; twenty-five to thirty. One was dark and the other fair, and they had the same semi-elegant look of stockholders, of men who go to the Stock Exchange and into drawing-rooms, who are to be seen everywhere, who live everywhere, and love everywhere. The dark one continued:

"I have told you about that little woman, a tradesman's wife, whom I met on the beach at Dieppe?"

"Yes."

"My dear fellow, you know what it is; there is some one in Paris whom I love dearly, an old friend, a good friend, and it has grown into a habit, in fact, and I value it very much."

"Your habit."

"Yes, my habit, and hers also. She is married to an excellent man, whom I also value very much, a very cordial fellow. A capital companion! I may say, I think that my life is bound up with that house."

"Well?"

"Well! they could not manage to leave Paris, and I found myself a widower at Dieppe."

"Why did you go to Dieppe?"

"For change of air. One cannot remain on the boulevards the whole time."

"And then?"

"Then I met the little woman I mentioned to you on the beach there."

"The wife of that head of his public office?"

"Yes, she was dreadfully dull; her husband only came every Sunday, and he is horrible! I understand her perfectly, and we laughed and danced together."

"And the rest?"

"Yes, but that came later. However, we met, we liked each other, I told her I liked her, and she made me repeat it, so that she might understand it better, and she put no obstacles in my way."

"Did you love her?"

"Yes, a little; she is very nice."

"And what about the other?"

"The other was in Paris! Well, for six weeks it was very pleasant, and we returned here on the best of terms. Do you know how to break with a woman, when that woman has not wronged you in any way?"

"Yes, perfectly well."

"How do you manage it?"

"I give her up."

"How do you do it?"

"I do not see her any longer."

"But supposing she comes to you?"

"I am . . . not at home."

"And if she comes again?"

"I say I am not well."

"If she looks after you?"

"I play her some dirty trick."

"And if she puts up with it?"

"I write to her husband anonymous letters, so that he may look after her on the days that I expect her."

"That is serious! I cannot resist, and do not know how to bring about a rupture, and so I have a collection of mistresses. There are some whom I do not see more than once a year, others every ten months, others on those days when they want to dine at a restaurant. Those whom I have put at regular intervals do not worry me, but I often have great difficulty with the fresh ones, so as to keep them at proper intervals."

"And then. . . ."

"Then this little woman was all fire and flame,

without any fault of mine, as I told you! As her husband spends the whole day at his office she began to come to me unexpectedly, and twice she nearly met my regular one on the stairs."

"The devil!"

"Yes; so I gave each of them her days, regular days, to avoid confusion, Saturday and Monday for the old one, Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday for the new one."

"Why did you show her the preference?"

"Ah! My dear friend, she is younger."

"So that only gave you two days to yourself in a week."

"That is enough for one."

"Allow me to compliment you on that."

"Well, just fancy that the most ridiculous and most annoying thing in the world happened to me. For four months everything had been going on perfectly; I felt perfectly safe, and I was really very happy, when suddenly, last Monday, the crash came.

"I was expecting my regular one at the usual time, a quarter-past one, and was smoking a good cigar and dreaming, very well satisfied with myself, when I suddenly saw that it was past the time, at which I was much surprised, for she is very punctual, but I thought that something might have accidentally delayed her. However, half an hour passed, then an hour, an hour and a half, and then I knew that something must have detained her; a sick headache, perhaps, or some annoying visitor. That sort of waiting is very vexatious, that . . .

useless waiting . . . very annoying and enervating. At last, I made up my mind to go out, and, not knowing what to do, I went to her and found her reading a novel.

"'Well,' I said to her. And she replied quite calmly:

"'My dear, I could not come, I was hindered.'

"'How?'

"'By . . . something else.'

"'What was it?'

"'A very annoying visit.'

"I saw that she would not tell me the true reason, and as she was very calm, I did not trouble myself any more about it, and hoped to make up for lost time with the other, the next day, and on the Tuesday I was very . . . very excited and amorous in expectation of the public official's little wife, and I was surprised that she had not come before the appointed time, and I looked at the clock every moment, and watched the hands impatiently, but the quarter passed, then the half hour, then two o'clock. I could not sit still any longer, and walked up and down very soon in great strides, putting my face against the window and my ears to the door, to listen whether she was not coming upstairs.

"Half-past two, three o'clock! I seized my hat and rushed to her house. She was reading a novel, my dear fellow! 'Well!' I said anxiously, and she replied as calmly as usual: 'I was hindered, and could not come.'

"'By what?'

"'An annoying visit.'

"Of course, I immediately thought that they both knew everything, but she seemed so calm and quiet that I set aside my suspicions, and thought it was only some strange coincidence, as I could not believe in such dissimulation on her part, and so, after half an hour's friendly talk, which was, however, interrupted a dozen times by her little girl coming in and out of the room, I went away, very much annoyed. Just imagine, the next day. . . ."

"The same thing happened?"

"Yes, and the next also. And that went on for three weeks without any explanation, without anything explaining their strange conduct to me, the secret of which I suspected, however."

"They knew everything?"

"I should think so, by George! But how? Ah! I had a great deal of anxiety before I found it out."

"How did you manage it at last?"

"From their letters, for on the same day they both gave me their dismissal in identical terms."

"Well?"

"This is how it was. . . . You know that women always have an array of pins about them. I know hairpins, I doubt them, and look after them, but the others are much more treacherous, those confounded little black-headed pins which look all alike to us, great fools that we are, but which they can distinguish, just as we can distinguish a horse from a dog.

"Well, it appears that one day my Minister's

little wife left one of those tell-tale instruments pinned to the paper, close to my looking-glass. My usual one had immediately seen this little black speck, no bigger than a flea, and had taken it out without saying a word, and then had left one of her pins, which was also black, but of a different pattern, in the same place.

"The next day the Minister's wife wished to recover her property, and immediately recognized the substitution. Then her suspicions were aroused, and she put in two and crossed them, and my original one replied to this telegraphic signal by three black pellets, one on the top of the other, and as soon as this method had begun, they continued to communicate with one another, without saying a word, only to spy on each other. Then it appears that the regular one, being bolder, wrapped a tiny piece of paper round the little wire point, and wrote upon it: 'C. D., Poste Restante, Boulevard Malherbes.'

"Then they wrote to each other. You understand that was not everything that passed between them. They set to work with precaution, with a thousand stratagems, with all the prudence that is necessary in such cases, but the regular one did a bold stroke, and made an appointment with the other. I do not know what they said to each other; all that I know is that I had to pay the costs of their interview. There you have it all!"

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"And you do not see them any more?"

"I beg your pardon. I see them as friends, for we have not quarrelled altogether."

"And have they met again?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, they have become intimate friends."

"And has not that given you an idea?"

"No. What idea?"

"You great booby! The idea of making them put back the pins where they found them."

THE TWENTY-FIVE FRANCS OF THE MOTHER SUPERIOR

HE certainly was a comical object, Daddy Pavilly, with his long spider legs, his little body, his long arms, and his head going up in a point and surmounted by a tuft of flaming red hair.

He was a clown, a peasant clown, a humourist, born to play tricks, to make people laugh, to act parts, simple parts, as he was a peasant's son and was himself a peasant who could scarcely read. Yes! God had certainly created him to amuse others, the poor country devils who have neither theatres nor fêtes, and he amused them conscientiously. In the café people treated him to drinks in order to keep him there, and he drank intrepidly, laughing and joking, teasing everybody without making any one angry, while the people were laughing heartily around him.

He was so droll that the very girls could not resist him, ugly as he was, because he made them laugh so. He would drag them about, joking all the while, and he tickled and squeezed them, saying such funny things that they held their sides while they pushed him away.

Toward the end of June he engaged himself as a harvest hand to farmer Le Harivau, near Rouville. For three whole weeks he amused the harvesters, male and female, by his jokes, both by day and night. During the day, when he was in the fields, he wore an old straw hat which hid his red shock of hair, and one saw him gathering up the yellow grain and tying it into bundles with his long, thin arms, and then suddenly stopping to make a funny gesture which made the labourers laugh all over the field. At night he crept in among the straw in the barn where the women slept, causing screams and exciting a disturbance. They drove him off with their wooden sabots, and he escaped on all fours, like a fantastic monkey, amid volleys of laughter from all assembled.

On the last day as the wagon full of reapers, decked with ribbons and playing bagpipes, shouting and singing with pleasure and drink, went along the white highroad, slowly drawn by six dapple-gray horses, driven by a lad in a smock, with a rosette in his cap, Pavilly, in the midst of the sprawling women, danced like a drunken satyr, and kept the little dirty-faced boys and astonished peasants standing staring at him open-mouthed on the way to the farm.

Suddenly, as they got to the gate of Le Harivau's farmyard, he gave a leap, lifting up his arms, but unfortunately, as he came down, he knocked against the side of the long wagon, fell over it onto the wheel, and rebounded into the road. His companions jumped out, but he did not move; one eye

was closed, while the other was open, and he was pale with fear, while his long limbs were stretched out in the dust. When they touched his right leg he began to scream, and when they tried to make him stand up, he immediately fell down.

"I think one of his legs is broken," one of the men said.

And so it really was. Harivau, therefore, had him laid on a table and sent off a man on horseback to Rouville to fetch the doctor, who came an hour later.

The farmer was very generous and said that he would pay for the man's treatment in the hospital; so the doctor carried Pavilly off in his carriage to the hospital, and had him put into a whitewashed ward, where the fracture was reduced.

As soon as he knew that it would not kill him and that he would be taken care of, coddled, cured, and fed without having anything to do except to lie on his back between the sheets, Pavilly's joy was unbounded, and he began to laugh silently and continuously, showing his decayed teeth.

Whenever one of the Sisters of Mercy came near his bed he made grimaces of satisfaction, winking, twisting his mouth awry, and moving his nose, which was very long and mobile. His neighbours in the ward, ill as they were, could not help laughing, and the Mother Superior often came to his bedside to be amused for a quarter of an hour. He invented all kinds of jokes and stories for her, and as he had the making of an actor in him, he would be devout in order to please her, and spoke of re-

ligion with the serious air of a man who knows that there are times when jokes are out of place.

One day he took it into his head to sing to her. She was delighted and came to see him more frequently, and then she brought him a hymn-book, so as to utilize his voice. Then he might be seen sitting up in bed, for he was beginning to be able to move, singing the praises of the Almighty and of Mary, in a falsetto voice, while the kind, stout sister stood by him and beat time with her finger. When he could walk the Superior offered to keep him for some time longer to sing in chapel, to serve at mass, and to fulfil the duties of sacristan, and he accepted. For a whole month he might be seen in his surplice, limping along, and singing the psalms and the responses, with such impressive movements of the head that the number of the faithful increased, and people deserted the parish church to attend vespers at the hospital.

But, as everything must come to an end in this world, they were obliged to discharge him, when he was quite cured, and the Superior gave him twenty-five francs in return for his services.

As soon as Pavilly found himself in the street with all that money in his pocket he asked himself what he was going to do. Should he return to the village? Certainly not before having a drink, for he had not had one for a long time, and so he went into a café. He did not go into the town more than two or three times a year, and he had a confused and intoxicating recollection of an orgie on one of those visits in particular. He asked for a glass of

the best brandy, which he swallowed at a gulp to prepare the way, and then he had another to see how it tasted.

As soon as the strong and fiery brandy had touched his palate and tongue, awakening more vividly than ever the sensation of alcohol of which he was so fond, which soothes, and stings, and burns the mouth, he knew that he should drink a whole bottle of it, and he asked what it cost, so as to get it more cheaply than in single drinks. They charged him three francs, which he paid, and then he began quietly to get drunk.

However, he had some method in it, as he wished to keep sober enough for other pleasures, and so, as soon as he felt that he was on the point of seeing the chimneys bowing to him, he got up and went out with unsteady steps, with his bottle under his arm, in search of a house of amusement.

He found one, with some difficulty, after having asked a carter, who did not know of one; a postman, who directed him wrong; a baker, who began to swear and called him an old pig; and, lastly, a soldier, who was obliging enough to take him to one, and advised him to choose La Reine.

Although it was barely twelve o'clock, Pavilly went into that palace of delights, where he was received by a servant, who wanted to turn him out again. But he made her laugh by making a grimace, showed her three francs, the usual price of the special entertainment of the place, and followed her with difficulty up a dark staircase, which led to the first floor.

When he had been shown into a room he asked for La Reine, and had another drink out of the bottle while he waited. But very shortly the door opened and a girl came in. She was tall, fat, red-faced, enormous. She looked at the drunken fellow, who had fallen into a seat, with the eye of a judge of such matters, and said:

"Are you not ashamed of yourself at this time of day?"

"Ashamed of what, Princess?" he stammered.

"Why, of disturbing a lady before she has even had time to eat her dinner."

He wanted to have a joke, so he said:

"There is no such thing as time for the brave."

"And there ought to be no time for getting drunk, either, old guzzler."

At this he got angry:

"I am not a guzzler, and I am not drunk."

"Not drunk?"

"No, I am not."

"Not drunk? Why, you could not even stand up straight;" and she looked at him with the angry look of a woman who is disturbed at her dinner.

"I . . . I could dance a polka," he replied, getting up on a chair to show how steady he was; and twirling round, he jumped onto the bed, where his thick, muddy shoes made two great marks.

"Oh! you dirty brute!" cried the girl, rushing at him, striking him such a blow in the stomach with her clinched fist that Pavilly lost his balance, fell and struck the foot of the bed, and, turning a

complete somersault, tumbled on to the washstand, and, dragging the pitcher and basin with him, then rolled to the ground, roaring.

The noise was so loud and his cries so piercing that everybody in the house rushed in, the master, mistress, servant, and the staff.

The master of the house attempted to lift him up, but as soon as he stood him on his feet the peasant lost his balance again, and then began to cry out that his leg was broken, the other leg, the sound one.

It was true, so they sent for a doctor, and it happened to be the same one who had attended him at Le Harivau's.

"What! Is it you again?" he said.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"What is the matter with you?"

"Somebody has broken my other leg for me, Monsieur."

"Who did it, old fellow?"

"Why, a female."

Everybody was listening. The girls in their dressing-gowns, with their mouths still greasy from their interrupted dinner, the mistress of the house furious, the master nervous.

"This will be a bad job," the doctor said. "You know that the municipal authorities look upon you with very unfavourable eyes. We must try and hush the matter up."

"What can we do?" the master of the place asked.

"Why, the best way would be to send him back to

the hospital, from which he has just been discharged, and to pay for him there."

"I would rather do that," the master of the house replied, "than have any fuss made about the matter."

So half an hour later Pavilly returned drunk and groaning to the ward which he had left an hour before. The Superior raised her arms to express her sorrow, for she liked him, and her face beamed, for she was not sorry to see him again.

"Well, my good fellow, what is the matter with you now?"

"The other leg is broken, Madame."

"So you have been riding on another straw wagon, you old joker?"

And Pavilly, sullen and confused, stammered:

"No . . . no. . . . Not this time, no . . . not this time. No . . . no. . . It was not my fault, not my fault. . . It was a straw mattress."

She could get no other explanation out of him, and never knew that his relapse was due to her twenty-five francs.

THE CONFESSION

MONSIEUR DE CHAMPDELIN had no reason to complain of his lot as a married man; nor could he accuse destiny of having played him a bad turn, as it does so many others, for it would have been difficult to find a more desirable, a merrier, prettier little woman, one who was easier to amuse and to guide, than his wife. To see the large, limpid eyes which lighted up her fair, girlish face, one would think that her mother must have spent whole nights before her birth in looking dreamily at the stars, and so had become, as it were, impregnated with their magic brightness. And one did not know which to prefer—her bright, silky hair or her slightly *retroussé* nose, with its vibrating nostrils, her red lips, which looked as alluring as a ripe peach, her beautiful shoulders, her delicate ears, which resembled mother-of-pearl, or her slim waist and rounded figure, which would have delighted and tempted a sculptor.

And then she was always merry, overflowing with youth and life, never dissatisfied, only wishing to enjoy herself, to laugh, to love and be loved, and putting all the house into a tumult, as if it were a great cage full of birds. In spite of all this, how-

ever, that worn-out fool, Champdelin, had never cared much about her, but had left that charming garden lying waste, and almost immediately after their honeymoon he had resumed his usual bachelor habits, and had begun to lead the same fast life that he had done of old.

It was stronger than he, for his was one of those libertine natures which are constant targets for love, and which never resign themselves to domestic peace and happiness. The last woman he came across, in a love adventure, was always the one whom he loved best. The mere contact with a petticoat inflamed him and made him commit the most imprudent actions.

As he was not hard to please, he fished, as it were, in troubled waters, went after the ugly ones and the pretty ones alike, was bold even to impudence, was not to be discouraged by mistakes, nor anger, nor modesty, nor threats, though he sometimes fell into a trap and got a thrashing from some relative or jealous lover; he withstood all attempts to get blackmail from him, and became only more enamoured of vice and more ardent in his lures and pursuit of love affairs on that account.

But the workgirls and the shopgirls and all the tradesmen's wives in Saint Martéjoux knew him, and made him pay for their whims and their coquetry, and had to put up with his lovemaking. Many of them smiled or blushed when they saw him under the tall plane trees in the public garden or met him in the unfrequented narrow streets

near the Cathedral, with his thin, sensual face, whose looks had something satyr-like about them, and some of them used to laugh at him and make fun of him, though they ran away when he went up to them. And when some friend who was sorry that he could forget himself so far would say to him, when he was at a loss for any other argument: "And your wife, Champdelin? Are you not afraid that she will have her revenge and pay you out in your own coin?" his only reply was a contemptuous and incredulous shrug of the shoulders.

She deceive him, indeed; she, who was as devout, as virtuous, and as ignorant of forbidden things as a nun, who cared no more for love than she did for an old slipper! She, who did not even venture on any veiled allusions, who was always laughing, who took life as it came, who performed her religious duties with edifying assiduity, she to pay him back, so as to make him look ridiculous, and to gad about at night? Never! Any one who could think such a thing must have lost his senses.

However, one summer day, when the roofs all seemed red-hot and the whole town appeared dead, Monsieur de Champdelin had followed two milliner's girls, with bandboxes in their hands, from street to street, whispering nonsense to them and promising beforehand to give them anything they asked him for, and had gone after them as far as the Cathedral. In their fright they took refuge there, but he followed them in, and, emboldened by the solitude of the nave and by the perfect silence in the building, he became more enterprising

and bolder. They did not know how to protect themselves or to escape from him, and were trembling at his daring attempts and at his kisses, when he saw a confessional whose doors were open in one of the side chapels. "We should be much more comfortable in there, my little dears," he said, going into it as if to get such an unexpected nest ready for them.

But they were quicker than he, and, throwing themselves against the grated door, they pushed it to before he could turn round, and locked him in. At first he thought it was only a joke, and it amused him; but when they began to laugh and put out their tongues at him, as if he had been a monkey in a cage, and overwhelm him with insults, he first of all grew angry, and then humble, offering to pay well for his ransom, and he implored them to let him out, and tried to escape, like a mouse out of a trap. They, however, did not appear to hear him, but roguishly bowed to him ceremoniously, wished him good night, and ran out as fast as they could.

Champdelin was in despair; he did not know what to do, and cursed his bad luck. What would be the end of it? Who would deliver him from that kind of prison, and was he going to remain there all the afternoon and night, like a portmanteau in a lost-baggage office? He could not manage to force the lock, and did not venture to knock hard against the sides of the confessional, for fear of attracting the attention of some beadle or sacristan. Oh! those wretched girls, and how people

would make fun of him, and write verses about him, and point their fingers at him, if the joke were discovered and noised abroad!

By and by he heard the faint sound of prayers in the distance, and through the green serge curtain that concealed him, Monsieur Champdelin heard the rattle of beads on the rosaries, as the women repeated their *Ave Maria,* and the rustle of dresses and the noise of footsteps on the pavement.

Suddenly he felt a tickling in his throat that nearly choked him, and he could not prevent a fit of coughing, and when it was over the unfortunate man was horrified at hearing some one come into the chapel and up to the confessional. Whoever it was knelt down and gave a discreet knock at the grating which separated the priest from his penitents, so he quickly put on the surplice and stole, which were hanging on a nail, and, covering his face with his handkerchief and sitting back in the shadow, he opened the grating.

It was a woman, who was already murmuring a prayer, and he gave the responses as well as he could, from his boyish recollections, and was somewhat agitated by the delicious perfume that emanated from her half-raised veil and from her bodice; but at her first words he started so that he almost fainted. He had recognized his wife's voice, and it felt to him as if his seat were studded with sharp nails, as if the sides of the confessional were closing in on him, and as if the air were growing rarefied.

He collected himself, however, and, regaining his self-possession, listened to what she had to say with increasing curiosity, and with some uncertain and necessary interruptions. The young woman sighed, was evidently keeping back something, spoke about her unhappiness, her melancholy life, her husband's neglect, the temptations by which she was surrounded and which she found it so difficult to resist; her conscience seemed to be burdened by an intolerable weight, though she hesitated to accuse herself directly. And in a low voice, with unctuous and coaxing tones, and mastering himself, Champdelin said:

"Courage, my child; tell me everything; the divine mercy is infinite; tell me all, without hesitation."

Then, all at once, she told him everything that was troubling her; how passion and desire had thrown her into the arms of one of her husband's best friends, the exquisite happiness that they felt when they met every day, his delightful tenderness, which she could no longer resist, the sin which was her joy, her only object, her consolation, her dream. She grew excited, sobbed, seemed enervated and exhausted, as if she were still burning from her lover's kisses, hardly seemed to know what she was saying, and begged for temporary absolution from her sins. Champdelin, in his exasperation, and unable to restrain himself any longer, interrupted her in a furious voice:

"Oh! no! Oh! no; this is not at all funny . . . keep such things to yourself, my dear!"

Poor little Madame de Champdelin nearly went out of her mind with fright and astonishment, and they are now waiting for the decree which will break their chains and let them part.

A FATHER'S CONFESSION

ALL Véziers-le-Réthel had followed the funeral procession of M. Badon-Leremince to the grave, and the last words of the funeral oration pronounced by the delegate of the district remained in the minds of all: "He was an honest man, at least!"

An honest man he had been in all the known acts of his life, in his words, in his examples, his attitude, his behaviour, his enterprises, in the cut of his beard and the shape of his hats. He never had said a word that did not set an example, never had given an alms without adding a word of advice, never had extended his hand without appearing to bestow a benediction.

He left two children, a boy and a girl. His son was Counsellor General, and his daughter, having married a lawyer, M. Poirel de la Voulte, moved in the best society of Véziers.

They were inconsolable at the death of their father, for they loved him sincerely.

As soon as the ceremony was over the son, daughter, and son-in-law returned to the house of mourning, and, shutting themselves in the library, they opened the will, the seals of which were to be

broken by them alone and only after the coffin had been placed in the ground. This wish was expressed by a notice on the envelope.

M. Poirel de la Voulte tore open the envelope, in his character of a lawyer used to such operations, and having adjusted his spectacles, he read in a monotonous voice, made for reading the details of contracts:

"My children, my dear children, I could not sleep the eternal sleep in peace if I did not make to you from the tomb a confession, the confession of a crime, remorse for which has ruined my life. Yes, I committed a crime, a frightful, abominable crime.

"I was twenty-six years old, and I had just been called to the bar in Paris, and was living the life of young men from the provinces who are stranded in this town without acquaintances, relatives, or friends.

"I took a sweetheart. There are beings who cannot live alone. I was one of those. Solitude fills me with horrible anguish, the solitude of my room beside my fire in the evening. I feel then as if I were alone on earth, alone, but surrounded by vague dangers, unknown and terrible things; and the partition that separates me from my neighbour, my neighbour whom I do not know, keeps me at as great a distance from him as the stars that I see through my window. A sort of fever pervades me, a fever of impatience and of fear, and the silence of the walls terrifies me. The silence of a room where one lives alone is so intense and so melancholy! It is not only a silence of the mind; when a piece of furniture cracks a shudder goes through you, for you expect no noise in this melancholy abode.

"How many times, nervous and timid from this motionless silence, I have begun to talk, to repeat words without rhyme or reason, only to make some sound. My voice at those times sounds so strange that I am afraid of that, too. Is there anything more dreadful than talking to one's self in an empty house? One's voice sounds like that of another, an unknown voice talking aimlessly, to no one, into the empty air, with no ear to listen to it, for one

knows before they escape into the solitude of the room exactly what words will be uttered. And when they resound lugubriously in the silence, they seem no more than an echo, the peculiar echo of words whispered by one's thought.

"My sweetheart was a young girl like other young girls who live in Paris on wages that are insufficient to keep them. She was gentle, good, simple. Her parents lived at Poissy. She went to spend several days with them from time to time.

"For a year I lived quietly with her, fully decided to leave her when I should find some one whom I liked well enough to marry. I would make a little provision for this one, for it is an understood thing in our social set that a woman's love should be paid for, in money if she is poor, in presents if she is rich.

"But one day she told me she was *enceinte*. I was thunderstruck, and saw in a second that my life would be ruined. I saw the fetter that I should wear until my death, everywhere, in my future family life, in my old age, forever; the fetter of a woman bound to my life through a child; the fetter of the child whom I must bring up, watch over, protect, while keeping myself unknown to him, and keeping him hidden from the world. I was greatly disturbed at this news, and a confused longing, a criminal desire, surged through my mind; I did not formulate it, but I felt it in my heart, ready to come to the surface, as if some one hidden behind a portière should await the signal to come out. If some accident might only happen! So many of these little things die before they are born!

"Oh, I did not wish my sweetheart to die! The poor girl, I loved her very much! But I wished, possibly, that the child might die before I saw it.

"He was born. I set up housekeeping in my little bachelor apartment, an imitation home, with a horrible child. He looked like all children; I did not care for him. Fathers, you see, do not show affection until later. They have not the instinctive and passionate tenderness of mothers; their affection has to be awakened gradually, their mind must become attached by bonds formed each day between beings that live in each other's society.

"A year passed. I now avoided my home, which was too small, where soiled linen, baby-clothes, and stockings

the size of gloves were lying round, where a thousand articles of all descriptions lay on the furniture, on the arm of an easy-chair, everywhere. I went out chiefly that I might not hear the child cry, for he cried on the slightest pretext, when he was bathed, when he was touched, when he was put to bed, when he was taken up in the morning, incessantly.

"I had made a few acquaintances, and I met at a reception the woman who was to be your mother. I fell in love with her and became desirous to marry her. I courted her; I asked her parents' consent to our marriage, and it was granted.

"I found myself in this dilemma: I must either marry this young girl whom I adored, having a child already; or else tell the truth, and renounce her, and happiness, my future, everything; for her parents, who were people of rigid principles, would not give her to me if they knew.

"I passed a month of horrible anguish, of mortal torture, a month haunted by a thousand frightful thoughts; and I felt developing in me a hatred toward my son, toward that little morsel of living, screaming flesh, who blocked my path, interrupted my life, condemned me to an existence without hope, without all those vague expectations that make the charm of youth.

"But just then my companion's mother became ill, and I was left alone with the child.

"It was in December, and the weather was terribly cold. What a night! My companion had just left. I had dined alone in my little dining room, and I went gently into the room where the little one was asleep.

"I sat down in an armchair before the fire. The wind was blowing, making the windows rattle, a dry, frosty wind; and I saw through the window the stars shining with that piercing brightness that they have on frosty nights.

"Then the idea that had obsessed me for a month rose again to the surface. As soon as I was quiet it came to me and harassed me. It ate into my mind like a fixed idea, just as cancers must eat into the flesh. It was there, in my head, in my heart, in my whole body, it seemed to me; and it swallowed me up as a wild beast might have. I endeavoured to drive it away, to repulse it, to open my mind to other thoughts, as one opens a window to the fresh morning breeze to drive out the vitiated night air;

but I could not drive it from my brain, not even for a second. I do not know how to express this torture. It gnawed at my soul; and I felt a frightful pain, a real physical and moral pain.

"My life was ruined! How could I escape from this situation? How could I draw back, and how could I confess?

"And I loved the one who was to become your mother with a mad passion, which this insurmountable obstacle only aggravated.

"A terrible rage was taking possession of me, choking me, a rage that verged on madness! Surely I was crazy that evening!

"The child was sleeping. I got up and looked at it as it slept. It was he, this abortion, this spawn, this nothing, that condemned me to irremediable unhappiness!

"He was asleep, his mouth open, wrapped in his bedclothes, in a crib beside my bed, where I—I could not sleep.

"How did I ever do what I did? How do I know? What force urged me on, what malevolent power took possession of me? Oh, the temptation to crime came to me without any forewarning. All I recall is that my heart beat tumultuously. It beat so hard that I could hear it, as one hears the strokes of a hammer behind a partition. That is all I can recall—the beating of my heart! In my head there was a strange confusion, a tumult, a senseless disorder, a lack of presence of mind. It was one of those hours of bewilderment and hallucination when a man is neither conscious of his actions, nor able to guide his will.

"I gently raised the coverings from the body of the child; I turned them down to the foot of the crib, and he lay there uncovered and naked.

"He did not wake. Then I went toward the window, softly, quite softly, and I opened it.

"A breath of icy air glided in like an assassin; it was so cold that I drew aside, and the two candles flickered. I remained standing near the window, not daring to turn round, as if for fear of seeing what was going on behind me, and feeling the icy air passing continually across my forehead, my cheeks, my hands, the deadly air which kept streaming in. I stood there a long time.

"I was not thinking, I was not reflecting. All at once a little cough caused me to shudder frightfully from head to

foot, a shudder that I feel still to the roots of my hair. And with a frantic movement I abruptly closed both sides of the window, and turning round ran over to the crib.

"He was still asleep, his mouth open, quite naked. I touched his legs; they were icy cold, and I covered them up.

"My heart was suddenly touched, grieved, filled with pity, tenderness, love for this poor innocent being that I had wished to kill. I kissed his fine, soft hair long and tenderly; then I went and sat down before the fire.

"I reflected with amazement, with horror on what I had done, asking myself whence come those tempests of the soul in which a man loses all perspective of things, all command over himself, and acts as in a condition of mad intoxication, not knowing whither he is going—like a vessel in a hurricane.

"The child coughed again, and it gave my heart a wrench. Suppose it should die! O God! O God! What would become of me?

"I rose from my chair to go and look at him, and with a candle in my hand I leaned over him. Seeing him breathing quietly I felt reassured, when he coughed a third time. It gave me such a shock that I started backward, just as one does at sight of something horrible, and let my candle fall.

"As I stood erect after picking it up, I noticed that my temples were bathed in perspiration, that cold sweat which is the result of anguish of soul. And I remained until daylight bending over my son, becoming calm when he remained quiet for some time, and filled with atrocious pain when a weak cough came from his mouth.

"He awoke with his eyes red, his throat choked, and with an air of suffering.

"When the woman came in to arrange my room I sent her at once for a doctor. He came at the end of an hour, and said, after examining the child:

"'Did he not catch cold?'

"I began to tremble like a person with palsy, and I faltered:

"'No, I do not think so.'

"And then I said:

"'What is the matter? Is it serious?'

"'I do not know yet,' he replied. 'I will come again this evening.'

"He came that evening. My son had remained almost all day in a condition of drowsiness, coughing from time to time. During the night inflammation of the lungs set in.

"That lasted ten days. I cannot express what I suffered in those interminable hours that divide morning from night, night from morning.

"He died. . . .

"And since . . . since that moment, I have not passed one hour, not a single hour, without the frightful, burning recollection, a gnawing recollection, a memory that seems to wring my heart, awaking in me like a savage beast imprisoned in the depths of my soul.

"Oh! if I could have gone mad!"

M. Poirel de la Voulte raised his spectacles with a motion that was peculiar to him whenever he finished reading a contract; and the three heirs of the defunct looked at one another without speaking, pale and motionless.

At the end of a minute the lawyer resumed:

"That must be destroyed."

The other two bent their heads in sign of assent. He lighted a candle, carefully separated the pages containing the damaging confession from those relating to the disposition of money, then he held them over the candle and threw them into the fire.

And they watched the white sheets as they burned, till they were presently reduced to little crumbling black heaps. And as some words were still visible in white tracing, the daughter, with little strokes of the toe of her shoe, crushed the burning paper, mixing it with the old ashes in the fire.

Then all three stood there watching it for some time, as if they feared that the destroyed secret might escape from the fireplace.

HOPE

I HAD stopped at Barvilier solely because I had read in a guide-book (I have forgotten which one): "Fine museum, two Rubens, one Téniers, one Ribera."

I said to myself: "Let us see this. I can dine at the Hôtel de l'Europe, which is recommended by the book as being excellent, and I can leave the following day."

The museum was closed; it is opened only at the request of travellers; it was, therefore, opened at my request, and I was able to observe a few daubs, attributed by some conservative fantastic to the first masters of painting.

Then I found myself alone and, as I had absolutely nothing to do, I walked along the main street of this little town and looked at a few of the shops; then, at about four o'clock, I was seized by one of those fits of discouragement that madden the most energetic.

What could I do? Heavens, what could I do? I would have paid five hundred francs for something to distract my mind! As I could think of nothing, I decided simply to smoke a good cigar, and I looked for the tobacco-shop. I soon recog-

nized it by the red lantern, and I entered. The woman held out a few boxes for me to choose from. After I had looked at the cigars, which I judged to be frightful, I happened to observe the owner.

She was a woman of about forty-five, gray-haired and robust. She had a well-filled-out figure and a respectable look in which I seemed to find something familiar. But I could not know this lady. No, assuredly I did not know her. But was it not just possible that I might have met her? Yes, that might be! This face was certainly familiar to my eye, perhaps some old acquaintance lost sight of, changed, and undoubtedly enormously filled out since I had last seen her.

I murmured: "Excuse me, Madame, for examining you thus, but it seems as if I have known you for a long time."

She replied, blushing: "That's strange . . . I feel the same way."

I cried out: "Ah! it's Hope!"

She raised her hands in comical despair, frightened by this word and stammering: "Oh! oh! if you were to be heard!" Then suddenly she in turn exclaimed: "Why, isn't that you, Georges?" Then she looked around to make sure that no one had heard us. But we were alone, quite alone.

Hope! how had I been able to recognize Hope, poor Hope, thin Hope, the despairing Hope, in this placid and plump government employee?

Hope! What memories suddenly awoke within me: Bougival, La Grenouillère, Chatou, the Restaurant Fournaise, the long boating trips along

the banks of the river; ten years of my life spent in that corner of the world, on that delightful stream.

There were twelve of us then, living in the Galopois house at Chatou. We were always half naked and tipsy. The customs of the present-day boatmen have greatly changed. These gentlemen now wear monocles. Now, our troop had a dozen or so of regular or irregular boatwomen. On some Sundays we had four of them, on others we had the whole lot. Some of them practically lived with us and others only came when they had nothing better to do. Five or six of them lived openly at the expense of any unmarried man—among them was Hope.

She was a poor, thin girl who limped. This infirmity gave her the gait of a grasshopper. She was timid and clumsy in everything she did. She would timidly take up the humblest, quietest, and poorest of us and keep him for a day or a month, according to his means. Nobody could remember how she happened among us. Had we picked her up during one of our carousals at the Boatman's Ball and carried her along with us, as we often did? Had we, perhaps, invited her to luncheon when we saw her sitting alone at a little table in the corner? None of us would have been able to say; but one thing was certain—she was one of us.

We had christened her "Hope," because she was always complaining of fate and of her hard luck. Every Sunday some one would ask her: "Well,

Hope, how are things going with you?" And she would invariably answer: "None too well now, but let's hope that they'll get better some day."

How had this poor, homely, clumsy creature come to take up the profession that demands such a high degree of gracefulness, tact, cunning, and beauty? It was a mystery. Paris is full of this kind of girls, who are homely enough to frighten away a gendarme.

What was her occupation during the six week-days? Several times she had told us that she worked—but at what? We did not know; we were indifferent to her existence.

Then, little by little, I had lost sight of her. Our group slowly scattered, giving way to another generation, to which we left Hope. I heard this while taking luncheon at Fournaise, as I did from time to time.

Finally, after all these years, I found her presiding over a tobacco-stand in Barvilier.

"Well, how is everything going now?" I said to her.

"A little better," she answered.

I was seized with a curiosity to know the life of this woman. Formerly I never should have thought of such a thing; now I felt interested, attracted, and I asked her: "How did this good luck come to you?"

"I don't know; it came to me when I was least expecting it."

"Did it come as a result of your trips to Chatou?"

"Oh, no!"

"Where?"

"At Paris, in the house where I lived."

"Ah! Were you not working in Paris?"

"Yes, with Madame Ravelet."

"Who is Madame Ravelet?"

"You don't know who Madame Ravelet is?"

"No."

"The milliner, the big milliner of the Rue de Rivoli."

Then she began to tell me a thousand and one things of her old life, secrets of Parisian life, of the interior of a milliner's establishment, the life of the girls, their adventures, their ideas, the whole story of the heart of a working-girl, that hawk which hunts on the street as it goes to the shop in the morning, as it saunters along bare-headed after luncheon, and in the evening as it goes home.

Happy at the chance to talk of former times, she said: "If you only knew what rascals we were, and what tricks we used to play! We used to tell each other about them every day. If you only knew how we used to make fun of the men!

"The first trick that I played was about an umbrella. I had an old alpaca one of which I was ashamed. One day, as I was going to the shop, the tall Louise asked me: 'How do you dare to go out with that?'

"'But I have no other, and funds are low.'

"Funds were always low!

"She answered: 'Go get one at the Madeleine.'

"Naturally I was surprised at this remark; but she continued: 'That is where we all get ours; there are as many there as you may wish for.' And she explained the whole matter to me. It is very simple.

"Well, I set out for the Madeleine with Irma. We went to the sexton and we explained to him how we had lost an umbrella the preceding week. Then he asks us if we can remember what kind of handle it had, and I describe some kind of agate knob. He leads us into a room where there are about fifty lost umbrellas; we look at them all, but cannot find mine; but I choose a fine one with a beautiful carved ivory handle. Louise went to claim it a few days later. She described it without seeing it, and it was unhesitatingly given to her. To do this we used to wear our best clothes."

She was laughing and opening and closing the cigar-box.

She continued: "Oh, we used to have some funny times! There were five of us in the atelier, four of us quite ordinary-looking and one very handsome, the beautiful Irma. She was very distinguished and had a lover in the State Council. But that did not stop her from having a good time. One winter's day she said to us: 'Girls, I know a good one.' And she told us her idea.

"You know Irma was very stylish, and she had a figure which upset most men. Well, she said she had an idea that would make us a hundred francs apiece with which to buy rings and so forth. She arranged the matter as follows:

"You know that I was not rich at that time, nor were the others; things were not very prosperous; we were earning a hundred francs a month at the shop, not a sou more. We had to find something. I know that each of us had two or three lovers who gave us a little something, but not very much. Sometimes, during our noon stroll, it happened that we would hook some gentleman who would return the following day. But those men never bring in much. Those of Chatou were only for pleasure! Oh! if you only knew the tricks that we had! Really, some of them were funny enough to make you die of laughter! Therefore when Irma proposed to us a way of making a hundred francs we were fired by the idea. What I am going to tell you is very naughty, but that makes no difference; you know life, and then . . . when one has spent four years at Chatou . . .

"Well, she said to us: 'We are going to the ball of the Opéra. The most distinguished and richest men of Paris are there. I know them.'

"We did not believe her at first, but it was true; for those men are not meant for milliners; perhaps for Irma, but not for us; oh, no! Oh, that Irma was so stylish! You know that at the shop we used to say that if the Emperor had known her he would undoubtedly have married her.

"She dressed us up in our best clothes and said: 'You are not to go in to the ball; each one of you is to stay in a cab in one of the neighbouring streets. A gentleman will come and get into the cab. As soon as he has climbed in you are to kiss

him as sweetly as you can; and then you are to cry out to show that you have made a mistake, that you were expecting somebody else. The thought that he is taking some one else's girl will excite him, and he will want to stay, anyhow; you will do all that you can to drive him away . . . and then . . . you will take supper with him. Then he will owe you damages.'

"You don't understand, do you? Well, this is what the rascal did. She made all four of us get into four very stylish-looking carriages, which she stationed in streets neighbouring the Opéra. Then she went to the ball all alone. As she knew by name the most prominent men in Paris, because our firm supplied their wives, she picked out one of them. She talked to him and amused him, for she was very witty. When she saw that he was well excited, she took off her domino and he was caught in the net. He wished to take her away immediately, and she promised to meet him in half an hour in a cab opposite Number Twenty of the Rue Taitbout. It was I who was in that carriage! I was well wrapped up and heavily veiled. So, suddenly, a gentleman popped his head through the door and asked: 'Is that you?'

"I answered in a low voice: 'Yes, it is I; get in quickly.'

"He gets in and I take him in my arms and kiss him and hug him so hard that I almost choke him; then I continue: 'Oh, how happy I am!'

"And suddenly I exclaim: 'But it is not you! Heavens! Heavens!' And I begin to cry.

"You can imagine how embarrassed the man was! At first he tries to console me; he makes excuses, protests that he also has made a mistake! I was still crying, but not so hard; and I was heaving great sighs. Then he told me very sweet things. He was a very proper gentleman, and it amused him to watch me stop crying little by little.

"To make a long story short, he suddenly invited me to supper. I refused; I tried to escape from the carriage; he held me back, and then he kissed me as I had kissed him when he entered the carriage.

"And then . . . and then . . . we . . . had supper . . . you understand . . . and he gave me . . . guess . . . he gave me five hundred francs! Aren't some men generous?

"Well, the affair was a success for everybody. It was Louise who got the least—she made only two hundred francs. But you know, really, Louise was too thin!"

The woman kept rattling on, emptying all the memories from her heart, which had been closed for so long. The whole sordid yet merry past was moving her soul. She regretted the gallant and bohemian life of the Parisian streets, composed of privations and of paid caresses, of laughter and of misery, of cunning and of love, true at times.

"But how did you get your tobacco shop?" I asked her.

She answered, smiling: "Oh, that is quite a

story! Next door to me in the same house lived a law student—one of those students who never do anything. This one lived in a café from morning until night; and he loved billiards better than he ever loved anybody in his whole life.

"When I was alone we sometimes spent the evening together. It is from him that I have Roger."

"Who is Roger?"

"My son."

"Ah!"

"He settled a small income on me with which to bring up the boy; but I was pretty sure that that fellow would never be of any use to me, the more so that I never saw a man who was quite so lazy, never. After ten years he had not yet passed his first examination. When his family saw that they could get no work out of him, they had him come home; but we kept up a correspondence on account of the child. And then—just imagine—two years ago, at the last elections, I hear that he has been elected deputy! And he made speeches in the House. 'In the kingdom of the blind,' as the proverb says. But, to conclude, I went to see him, and he immediately got me a tobacco-stand, on the grounds that my father had been deported. It was true that he had been deported, but I never thought that that would ever be of any use to me.

"Well. . . . Ah, here is Roger!"

A very correctly dressed, tall, serious-looking young man entered. He kissed his mother, who turned to me and said: "There, Monsieur, this is

my son, the chief clerk to the Mayor. . . . You know. . . . He is a future sub-prefect."

I gravely bowed to this representative of the government, shook hands seriously with Hope, and went back to the hotel.

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